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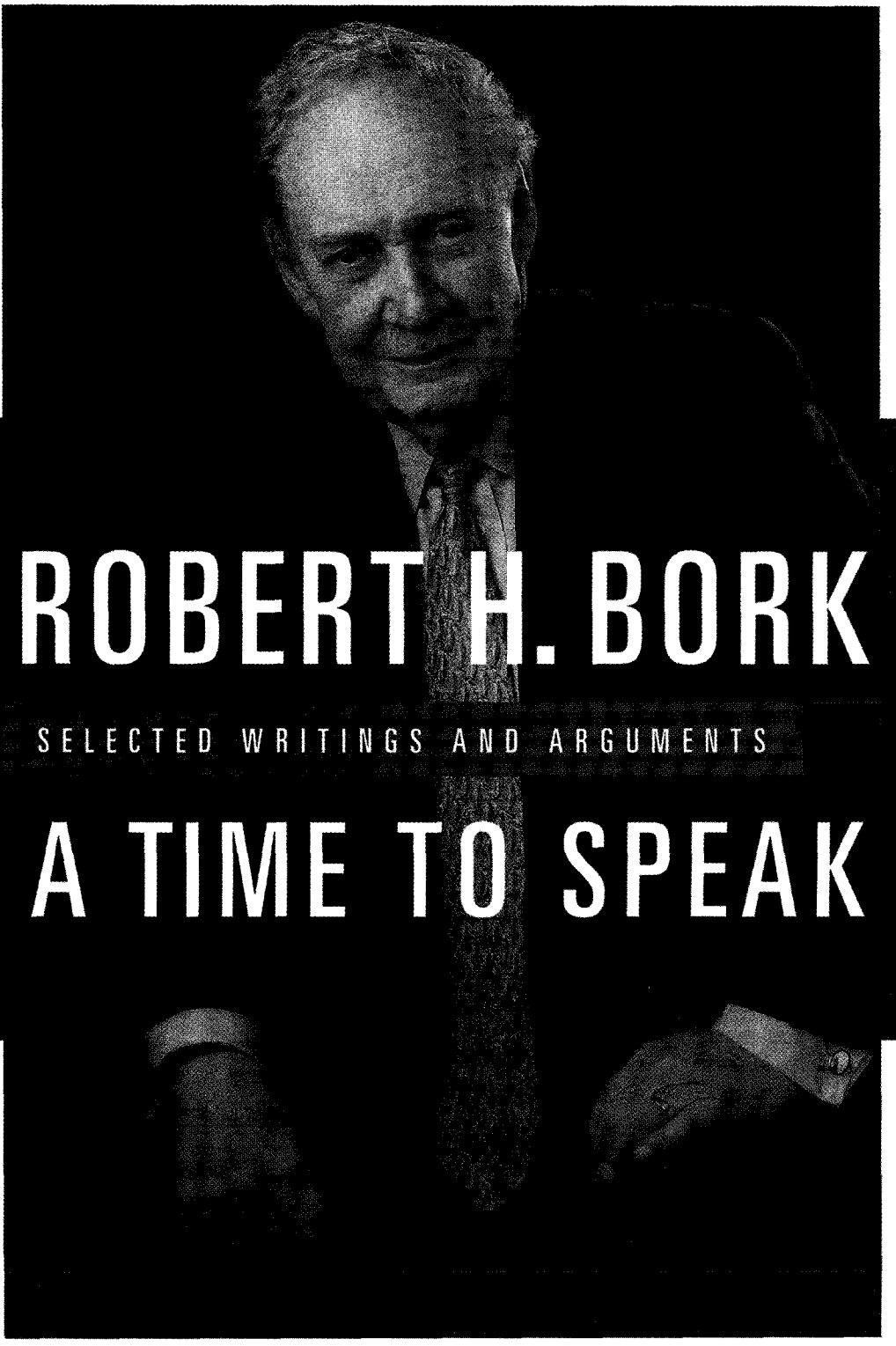

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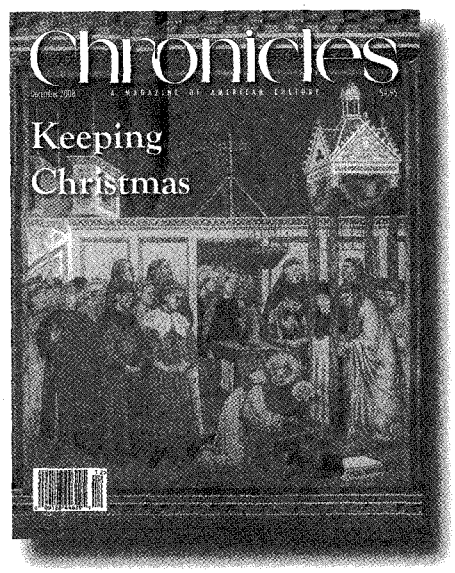

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Cover art by Giotto di Bondone.
Inside illustrations by Melanie Anderson.

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EDITOR
Thomas Fleming

EXECUTIVE EDITOR
Scott P. Richert

SENIOR EDITOR, BOOKS
Chilton Williamson, Jr.

ASSOCIATE EDITOR
Aaron D. Wolf

DESIGNER
Melanie Anderson

INTERIOR ARTIST
George McCartney, Jr.

CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
Katherine Dalton, Tom Landess, Tom Piatak, Joseph Sobran, James O. Tate, Taki Theodoracopulos, Clyde Wilson

CORRESPONDING EDITORS
Wayne Allensworth, Donald Livingston, Roger D. McGrath, William Mills, William Murchison, Claude Polin

EUROPEAN EDITOR
Andrei Navrozov

FILM EDITOR
George McCartney

FOREIGN-AFFAIRS EDITOR
Srdja Trifkovic

LEGAL-AFFAIRS EDITOR
Stephen B. Presser

POETRY EDITOR
Catharine Savage Brosman

CIRCULATION MANAGER
Cindy Link

PUBLISHER
The Rockford Institute

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On Socialized Medicine

In "The Obama Presidency" (*Views*, October), Doug Bandow warned that Democrat Barack Obama and his leftist policies will bring us some undesirable things, including big government and socialized medicine. Of course, during the presidency of Republican President George W. Bush, even when the Republicans controlled Congress, government got much bigger and much more intrusive. And while many conservatives claim to fear big government, they enthusiastically embrace multinational behemoths that are answerable to no one. The nice little story that giant corporations answer to the free market is a useful cover for what often occurs: Financial intimidation of little concerns, crony capitalism, and the gaining of lucrative government contracts through political connections. Megacorporations exercise a lot of control over the mythical free market. The current financial meltdown is the fruit of this bitter tree.

Because "the left would remain the left," Bandow warns that Obama's government-sponsored healthcare system must be defeated because it would "socialize medicine." The Republicans, on the other hand, have proposed having a number of private insurance companies administer our healthcare system. Talk about creating a bureaucracy! There would be a number of different insurance companies that offer a variety of programs, all of which would be operating under the supervision of the 50 states, a real hodgepodge system. As it is today, we spend nearly one third of our healthcare dollars on administrative costs.

These insurance companies would determine what medical procedures would be covered and how much their plans would cost, in order to make a good profit. But in the minds of some conservatives, this would not constitute socialized medicine. To them, something amounts to socialism if it is done under the auspices of government. However, health insurance is by its very nature socialism in that the healthy are obligated to subsidize the unhealthy in the insurance pool, no matter who runs the pool.

We are told that we have the best healthcare system in the world. Certainly, it is the most expensive. When it comes to infant mortality and life expectancy, we rank considerably below other industrialized nations. A recent study of heart-attack patients found that the Canadians did just as well as American patients even though Canada's system is widely proclaimed here in America to be inferior.

I certainly am opposed to the ideology of socialism wherein the government runs and controls everything, but I am not against "socializing" certain activities when it might make economic sense. At the same time I am just as vehemently opposed to having a few large, private corporations running and controlling almost everything. This is corporatism and to be feared as much as socialism.

—Robert A. Charron
Raleigh, NC

Mr. Bandow Replies:

Today's healthcare system is far too bureaucratic, as Mr. Charron points out. But these problems largely result from a federal tax policy that encourages business provision of health insurance, and particularly of comprehensive health insurance that acts more as the prepayment of standard, recurring medical expenses than as coverage against unlikely catastrophic expenses. The consequences include high administrative expenses and arbitrary third-party controls over treatment.

The goal of healthcare reform should be to empower individuals and families by expanding health savings accounts and shifting the health-insurance tax deduction from employers to individuals. The system does need to be reformed, but that means placing medicine under consumer, rather than government, control.

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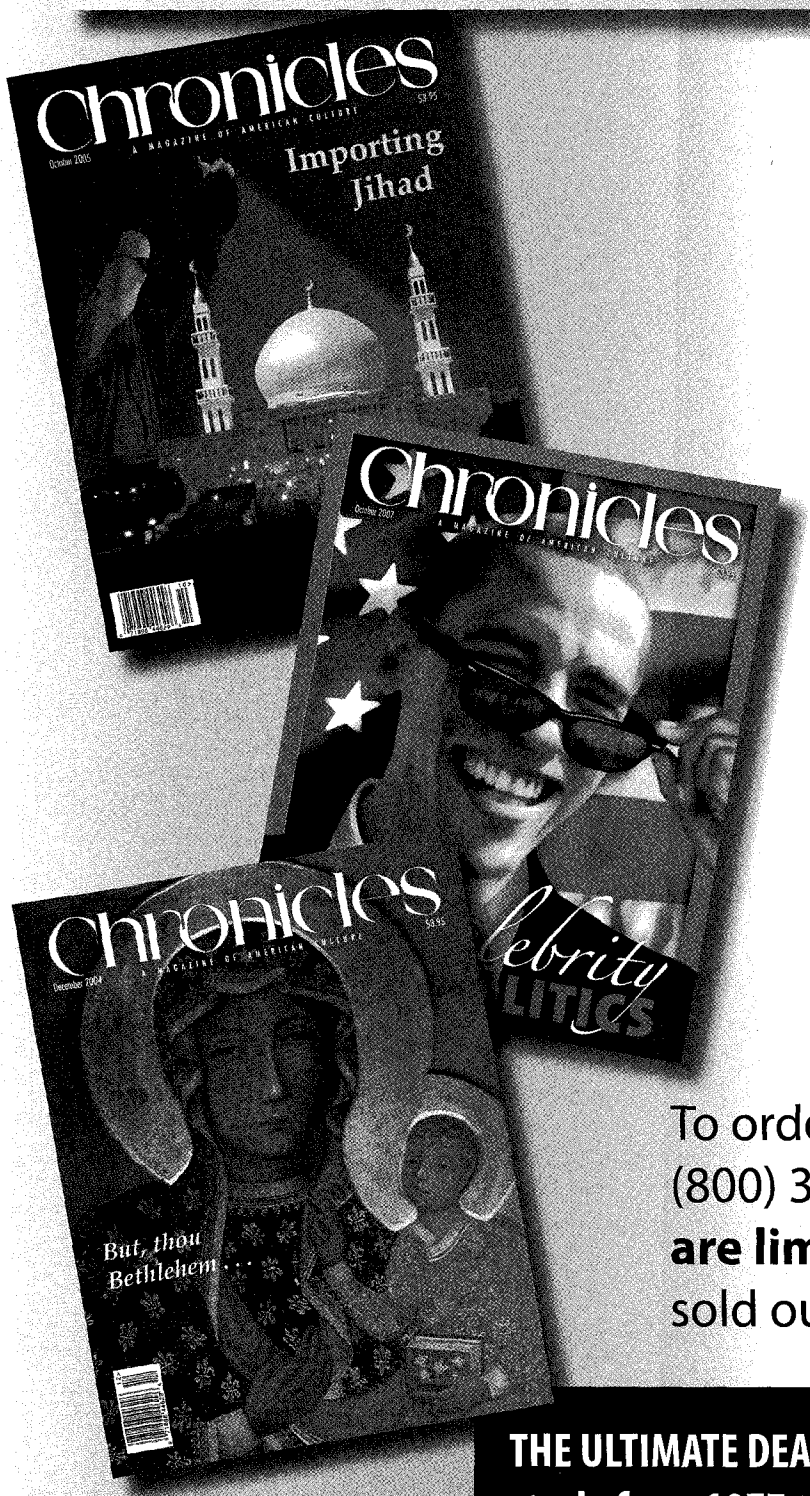

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by Justin Raimondo

The Bush Years: A Reversal

We have just survived eight years of the worst American presidency in modern times. For conservatives, the reign of Bush II was far worse than anything we had to endure previously, but at least in the case of outright statists like Franklin Delano Roosevelt, we knew what we were getting into. In the case of George W. Bush, however, the reversal is far more dramatic—as are the consequences for the country.

The 2000 Bush campaign was characterized by standard conservative economic orthodoxy in the style of Jack Kemp and the "opportunity society" of the supply-siders. We could still continue to support a gigantic welfare-warfare state, according to the underlying theory of "compassionate conservatism," as long as we continued to expand the money supply and give huge tax breaks and subsidies to the investor class, who would then create more wealth and more jobs—and "a rising tide lifts all boats." The business cycle, according to this doctrine, was repealed: It was up, up, up all the way, all the time, and there was no need to look back, or down, or in any direction but straight ahead. We could keep spending and borrowing, and there would be no consequences, no contraction—just eternal growth and rapid "progress."

The promise of the first Bush campaign was the prospect of "a more humble foreign policy," as the candidate famously put it in the course of one of the presidential debates. In reacting to moderator Jim Lehrer's suggestion that what the world needed, at that moment, was an international nation-building corps, led and financed by—of course—the United States, Bush channeled his future critics:

> I think one way for us to end up being viewed as the ugly American is for us to go around the world saying, "We do it this way. So should you." Now we trust freedom. We know freedom is a powerful, powerful—a powerful force much bigger than the United States of America, as we saw in—recently in the Balkans. But maybe I misunderstand where you're coming from [turning to Al Gore], Mr. Vice President, but I think the United States must be humble and must be proud and confident of our values, but humble in how we treat nations that are figuring out how to chart their own course.

If anything could be said of the Bush years, it is that arrogance was woven into the style of George W. Bush's presidency, and not just in terms of his aggressively messianic foreign policy: Hubris was the leitmotif of the Bush years, both in Washington and on Wall Street. A sense of entitlement pervaded the air, starting with the President himself, who inherited the Republican mantle from his father and treated the White House as just another family heirloom, one that would rightly come into his possession in due course.

This sense of entitlement was further strengthened by the very structure of our two-party system: The Democrats had just had eight years in the White House, and it was the GOP's turn at the helm. When they came to Washington, the Bushies were ready, willing, and eager to reorient the country according to their prescriptions and use the power invested in the federal government—which they had just spent eight years denouncing as a pernicious and growing force—for "good." "The adults are now in charge," they crowed, with smug self-satisfaction. What followed was the misrule of a notoriously childish and uninformed chief executive, whose public persona resembled nothing so much as a spoiled frat boy, who not only proceeded to break each and every one of his campaign promises but accomplished the special feat of inverting them.

In the foreign-policy realm, what we were promised was more "humility"—and what we got was an administration that took hubris to heights undreamed of by Icarus. On Bush's watch, the "ugly American" he previously disdained went beyond the merely hideous to achieve a scariness that has been perceived by much of the world as demonic. Having started out inveighing against "nation-building," he proceeded to institute this as the foundation of a new foreign-policy architecture. Invoking the half-forgotten tradition of republican modesty, he ended up as the virtual embodiment of an overweening pride—the sort that cometh before a fall.

Speaking of falls, the economic legacy of the Bush era may be the hardest to take and the most damaging. Under the rubric of "emergency" wartime spending, a Republican administration increased nonmilitary spending by nearly 20 percent in President Bush's first term, and by over 25 percent in his second—and that was before the big bank bailout, which may push the number upward of 50 percent.

Military spending shot through the roof, and then some. The scale of our hubris, during the Bush years, is precisely measured by the stark fact that our "defense" budget is more than the combined total of those of all other nations on earth. Nothing less than that is sufficient to enforce the infamous Bush Doctrine of preemptive war, which imparts to the U.S.

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president a Zeus-like power to hurl thunderbolts at will at any perceived threat to our "national security," real or imagined.

Yet "there is no security at the top of the world," as Garet Garrett pointed out more than half a century ago—and as September 11 proved. In the era of Bush II, we have spent ourselves into bankruptcy believing that there *is*—that in military hegemony lies security. As old Garrett knew in his bones, and conservatives have long since forgotten, exactly the opposite is the case.

In assessing the Bush years, one has to reckon with the neoconservatives, who played the key role in his downfall—and are now deserting his legacy and his party with the alacrity and speed of parasites who have finally finished off their host.

The one aspect that sets the Bush presidency apart from all others is the inordinate power and influence assumed by the office of the vice president, not only Dick Cheney personally but key members of his staff, including but not limited to "Scooter" Libby. Vice presidents tend to fade into the historical background rather quickly, unless they are called to carry out their chief duty, which is to assume the presidency in the event of the current occupant's untimely demise or disability. Cheney will be long remembered, however. Indeed, in retrospect, there are ample grounds for treating the Bush presidency as the Cheney regency.

As Colin Powell told it to Bob Woodward, the neocons centered in the office of the vice president set up a "separate government" and did an end run around the mainline intelligence and national-security agencies, cutting out of whole cloth the case for war with Iraq—and relentlessly pushing for war with Iran.

The palace revolution that allowed the neocons to take over the direction of U.S. foreign policy and drag us into the dual (and related) quagmires of Iraq and economic insolvency dates from well before September 11, and yet on that day they secured their grip on power and took us for a ride that is leading to a spectacular crash landing.

The story of how these migrants from the left took over the conservative movement—*National Review*, the big conservative foundations and grant-givers, the youth organizations, and the Republican Party—has been told many times, including in my recently reissued book *Reclaiming the American Right: The Lost Legacy of the Conservative Movement*, and I won't belabor the point here. Suffice it to say that these war birds are now calling for a "reformed" conservatism that accepts Big Government and retains the worst aspects of the Bush legacy: unabashed militarism and utopianism.

On the home front, we were promised "free enterprise"—and in the end, the Bushies wound up nationalizing the banks with a speed surpassing the fondest dreams of Norman Thomas, Eugene V. Debs, and the old Socialist Party of the United States.

Internationally, Bush pledged "humility"—and proceeded to put himself at the head of what he called a "global democratic revolution" destined to "liberate" Iraq and the entire Middle East.

Of course, none of this is new. In 1932, FDR campaigned on a platform of fiscal conservatism, less government spending, and the reining in of a rapidly proliferating government bureaucracy, a stance that attracted old-style liberals such as John T. Flynn to cast his vote for the Democratic ticket that year. Flynn was quickly disillusioned, however, as the new President came to personify the very vices he had once inveighed against. Lyndon Johnson, who depicted Barry Goldwater as a war-maddened maniac, was driven from office by howling mobs chanting, "Hey hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill to-daaay?"

If recent history teaches us anything, it is that we should expect the exact opposite of what we are promised at the outset. No matter who wins, then, we can project the future with a certain amount of accuracy. The candidate who promises us victory will likely preside over the most humiliating defeat, and the peace candidate is almost certain to take us into another, wider war. ◁

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DEFENSE OF GAY MARRIAGE ACT

At 11:30 A.M. on October 10, the Connecticut State Supreme Court legalized "gay marriage," making Connecticut the third state, behind Massachusetts and California, to sanction the practice. In a 4-3 ruling that cannot be appealed, because it is based on an interpretation of the state constitution, Justice Richard N. Palmer opined for the narrow majority that relegating homosexuals to civil unions is a violation of the Connecticut state constitution's equal-protection clause: "Interpreting our state constitutional provisions in accordance with firmly established equal protection principles leads inevitably to the conclusion that gay persons are entitled to marry the otherwise qualified same-sex partner of their choice. To decide otherwise would require us to apply one set of constitutional principles to gay persons and another to all others."

The Connecticut court actually did us a favor by cutting the legs from under the Trojan horse presented by the Obama and McCain campaigns: Both favor civil unions for homosexual couples but are against "gay marriage." So state legislatures can "protect" marriage by giving legal sanction "only" to civil unions, then the state courts can cry foul, declaring that anything less than "marriage" for homosexuals is a violation of "equal protection." Justice Palmer and the majority agreed with the "gay persons" (the plaintiffs) that "the discrimination to which they have been subjected has been so severe and so persistent that, as with race and sex discrimination, it is not likely to be remedied soon enough merely by resort to the majoritarian political process." Courts across the land could easily line up behind Justice Palmer, agreeing that homosexual couples "do not wield sufficient political power to obviate the need for heightened judicial protection," and that "gay persons are demonstrably less powerful than African-Americans and women, two groups that have been accorded protected status under the federal constitution."

The unconstitutional 14th amendment and the deleterious interpretation of its original intent are applied in this Connecticut State Supreme Court decision—and in the same breath in which "marriage" is declared to be special: "We conclude that, in light of the history of pernicious discrimination faced by gay men and lesbians, and because the institution of marriage carries with it a status and significance that the newly created classification of civil unions does not embody, the segregation of heterosexual and homosexual couples into separate institutions constitutes a cognizable harm." "We also conclude," the court quickly adds, that, "for the same reasons that classifications predicated on gender are considered quasi-suspect for purposes of the equal protection provisions of the United States constitution, sexual orientation constitutes a quasi-suspect classification for purposes of the equal protection provisions of the state constitution, and, therefore, our statutes discriminating against gay persons are subject to heightened or intermediate judicial scrutiny." The abstract Jacobin right of "equality" is applied to homosexuals in the context of "marriage"—grooms licensed to grooms and brides licensed to brides—and the Equal Protection Clause is handed to them as a weapon to force their way into other state courts under the color of the U.S. Constitution. The way has indeed been prepared to strike down all state Defense of Marriage Acts. And how could the courts not strike them down, when words such as "discrimination" and "segregation" are being deployed? The linkage between the prohibition of interracial marriages in some states, which the federal courts struck down, and "gay marriages" has already been made and will obviously be one of the major points in future briefs filed before the courts.

The vanguard of this decision has already crossed state lines. The governor of New York, in a disingenuous pretense of defending "traditional marriage" while acknowledging the decision of the Connecticut State Supreme Court, has stated that New York will recognized these "marriages" but will not allow them to take place on his soil.

The Connecticut Supreme Court asserts that marriage is an institution of "transcendent historical, cultural and social importance." Then the court, in an insidious irony, gives a biologically abnormal and socially deviant lifestyle equal status in the institution which it has so high-mindedly described.

No matter what any court or legislature says, Christians should understand that God is the author of marriage. He is the inextricable third party Who knits the union together as the man and woman give their vows. We would do well to remember that many of today's "heterosexual marriages," taken to vow solely within the framework of state licensure, are treated as nothing more than "civil unions": easy in and easy out, no-fault divorce on demand.

Marriage, the union of a man and a woman who become one flesh, is the foundation of the family, that commonwealth which emancipates us from our compulsions by instilling in us a sense of duty that ultimately, along with other virtues, brings us to be just men. "Gay marriage" is the antithesis of marriage. It enthrones compulsions, barbaric impulses, and enslaving desires. As such, it is simply a variation on an old but tempting theme originally played by the usurper in the garden.

—Robert Peters

OLMERT'S BOMBSHELL

Israel's outgoing Prime Minister Ehud Olmert says Israel will have to give up almost the entire occupied West Bank, including most settlements and East Jerusalem, as the price for peace with the Palestinians. "What I am saying to you now has not been said by any Is-

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raeli leader before me," he declared—and he was right. His comments have caused a major controversy: Israel officially considers the whole of Jerusalem her "eternal, undivided" capital, of which Olmert had been a hawkish mayor for a decade (1993-2003) before becoming prime minister.

Olmert told the Hebrew-language daily *Yediot Aharonot* that any parts of the West Bank retained by Israel would need to be compensated, in an eventual peace deal, by equal territory from pre-1967 Israel: "We have to reach an agreement with the Palestinians, the meaning of which is that in practice we will withdraw from almost all the territories, if not all the territories. . . . We will leave a percentage of these territories in our hands, but will have to give the Palestinians a similar percentage, because without that there will be no peace."

"Whoever wants to hold on to all of the city's territory will have to bring 270,000 Arabs inside the fences of sovereign Israel. It won't work," the caretaker premier added with reference to Jerusalem. "A decision has to be made. This decision . . . contradicts our natural instincts, our innermost desires, our collective memories, the prayers of the Jewish people for 2,000 years." Conceding that "for a large portion" of the past 35 years of political activity he was "unwilling to look at reality in all its depth," Olmert now admits that he "erred in his foreign policy views and actions for decades."

Olmert's assessment goes well beyond any stated readiness for territorial concessions by a key national political figure, let alone a prime minister still holding office. Even if his words give a much-needed boost to the Israeli left, what will they do for the long-stalled "peace process"? It may well continue humming promisingly on the Syrian front, but what Bashir Assad does, says, or thinks is of secondary importance. More worrisome is that, on the Palestinian side, Mahmoud Abbas may be removed from power come January 9—and his Islamist rivals do not acknowledge the need for any major concessions to Israel, including the recognition of her right to exist on any territory.

The suspicion that Arab promises are empty—unenforceable, or insincere, or both—is not confined to the Likud Party. The question is whether people on Israel's left who agree with Olmert will be able to obtain meaningful commitments from the Palestinian side before contemplating a new episode in the never-ending "process."

A leading Palestinian negotiator, Saeb Erekat, responded by pointing out that Olmert had not translated his current conciliatory ideas into formal offers during nearly a year of peace talks that started last November. "We have been having serious negotiations with the Israeli side, but up to this moment we have not received any written proposals from the Israeli side and Mr. Olmert," Erekat told the *Jerusalem Post*. The Palestinians want to put the progress made so far in writing, so that talks will not have to return to square one when Israel's next prime minister takes office, Erekat said.

Among reasonable people of good will on both sides of the divide in the Holy Land, the concept of land for peace is still fundamentally valid. It needs to be discussed in more practical terms than ever before, however: What land(s), exactly, for what kind of peace? Signed and sealed by whom, on what surety, and with what external guarantees?

Olmert's statements are likely to make it more difficult for the governing Kadima party's new leader, Tzipi Livni, to stave off elections that could return the Likud to power. Perhaps a secondary objective of Olmert's sudden ultra-dovishness is to frustrate his old Kadima rival, even if that means the return to power of Benjamin Netanyahu.

—*Srdja Trifkovic*

OBITER DICTA

The editors of *Chronicles* note with regret the departure, effective January 1, of **Srdja Trifkovic**, our longtime foreign-affairs editor. He has lasted longer than could be expected in a position that required much work for too little remuneration. With his help, *Chronicles* has gained attention around the world. We wish Srdja continued success in his career and expect to publish his work when he has the time to contribute to the magazine. Fortunately for us, his work has been ably supported by a competent and brilliant team of regular contributors—Wayne Allensworth, Doug Bandow, Ted Galen Carpenter, Andrea Crandall, Leon Hadar, and Edward Olsen—and by a growing list of area specialists: José Javier Esparza, Roberto de Mattei, Claude Polin, and Andreas Yannakopoulos, among many others. We are confident that *Chronicles*, in the coming years, will continue to broaden and deepen our coverage of foreign affairs.

Our poet this month is our poetry editor, **Catharine Savage Brosman**, professor *emerita* at Tulane University. A widely published poet, she is the author of several collections of verse, including her latest, *Range of Light* (LSU Press). Her work appears in this issue at the request of the editor.

Our cover is a photo of a painting by **Giotto di Bondone** (1266-1336). The hermitage in Greccio, 1299. Mural, 270 x 230 cm. Photo Credit: Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY. Upper Church, S. Francesco, Assisi, Italy.

Our cover layout and interior art are provided by our designer, **Melanie Anderson**. Mrs. Anderson received her B.F.A. from Northern Illinois University.

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by Thomas Fleming

Christmas Nightmares

Like many children growing up in the 1950's, he looked forward to Halloween even more than to Christmas. It was, admittedly, a difficult choice, because at Halloween, all he got was candy or a disappointing piece of fruit, while Christmas was a bigger bonanza even than his birthday. Nonetheless, after the anticipations of Christmas Eve and the visitations of carolers, the unwrapping of presents on Christmas morning was anticlimactic. Quickly working through the soft presents to get the socks and shirts out of the way, he moved on to the pair of Roy Rogers six-guns, chemistry set, or truck until his parents would bring out the big present—his first two-wheeler, a new sled, a pair of hockey skates. But then what did he have to look forward to? After an hour or two of showing off and comparing loot with his pals, there was the long slow day of losing interest in the new toys, ended by a dinner—worth looking forward to, certainly, for the food, but ruined by too much grown-up conversation or, worst of all, his grandparents who spoke some language they claimed was English but which he could never understand. If he was lucky, he would be permitted to escape to his room to read, though all too often his parents made him stay in the living room to make "conversation" with their friends. He obliged by showing off his amazingly boring set of astronomical statistics: the circumference of the earth, Mars, and Jupiter; Earth's distance from the sun, Alpha Centauri, or Vega; the surface temperature of Venus and Mercury. A half-hour of this was usually enough to earn him a reprieve from the mind-numbed grown-ups. "Smart kid" was their polite way of saying, "Send him to bed."

As he grew older, the finest moment was looking out the window at the stars glittering hard upon the heaped-up snow, knowing, with a sigh, that it was all over for another year.

Halloween was just the reverse, an ordinary day punctuated by the stupid parties at school that seemed designed to take the magic out of the holiday. In the early years, when he had been dressed up as a ghost—blinded by the sheet whose holes never matched his eyes—and dragged from house to house by an exasperated sister screaming, "Come on, hurry up, you little dope," he came back more than once bruised and bleeding from running into a tree or splitting his head on the boulder that a crazy old woman kept in front of her cottage. But by the time he was eight or so, he could go out with his friends and face the terrors of a cold autumn night. If Christmas was a prison ruled by domineering old people who refused to let him play with his new toys—"Just keep that in the box until we have time to read the instructions"—Halloween was the Get Out of Jail Free Card so sought after when losing at Monopoly with his sister, a born plutocrat who did not hesitate to cheat. (She was, after all, the banker.)

He and his friends never actually soaped—much less waxed—any windows, though, in the case of old Mr. Van Horne, who spent September nights protecting his garden with a shotgun loaded with rock salt (so they said), they were sorely tempted. They did lie in wait behind bushes to jump out and scare the littler kids who came by, but that was the extent of their mischief. It did not matter what they did because they were free, free even to eat so much candy that they would be sick all night.

But as much fun as it was to demand—and get—the treats by methods that sounded a lot like the techniques used by the hard boys in the blackmail or protection rackets, the real thrill of Halloween was the eerie sense of something inexplicable out there, something that could not be explained away by an atheist father or by the rationalist moralizings he heard from Christian friends, who cheated, lied, and stole more than he did. Sure, Jesus must have been a swell guy, but as presented in school and at the occasional Sunday-school class he attended with neighbors, he was a little too much like the YMCA camp counselors who talked a good game about playing straight and leading a good life but were no less likely to write bad checks or abandon their wives. Less crudely generous than Santa Claus but certainly more real than the Easter Bunny, Jesus sometimes reminded him a bit of the Pilgrim fathers they had to pretend to be on Thanksgiving, despite the fact that among the Swedes, Polacks, and Micks in his class, none of them could trace his ancestry back to Plymouth or even Massachusetts Bay. At least Capt. John Smith had been an Indian fighter, but Jesus fought nobody, not even the Devil, who won in the end. That is what Easter was all about—dying on the cross with no complaints and then, oh yeah, some story about pie in the sky when you die, as Rev. Ike, the "success and prosperity preacher" on the radio, dismissed the immaterial blessings of the Faith. Perhaps his dislike of Christianity came from his father, but it was exacerbated by the preacher's kid in his class—a nasty little piece of work who flattered the teachers and tried to get the other boys in trouble when they beat him up as he deserved.

On Halloween, there was nothing or no one you could put a name to, no cut-out figures in a pageant, no Squanto who betrayed his own people to curry favor with aliens, no gentle Jesus meek and mild, who refused to resist evil even

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to save himself. There were only fearsome things with no name, dead people who walked the earth and the demons let out of Hell on a one-night pass.

He grew up and learned how wrong he had been about the Crucifixion, but he retained his distaste for the smarmy race-traitor Squanto. Instead of turning against Halloween, he appreciated it even more now that he understood its significance as the eve of the holy days of All Saints and All Souls, when Christians everywhere are supposed to honor those who have died in faith and fear. Yes, he understood the objections of fundamentalists who spotted borrowings from pagan cults such as the Roman Parentalia and Lemuria, but the same fundamentalists, so eager to put the Christ back in Christmas, took pagan trees into their houses and exchanged pagan rings at their weddings. What they really objected to, he began to suspect, was the sense of dread and awe the night inspired. All their chipper talk about dying and going straight to Heaven seemed to conceal a terrified refusal to consider the terrors of death. If death is such a pleasant thing for people who say the right magic words, then why did Christ Himself, praying in the Garden, say "Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me"? In a stronger age of faith, William Dunbar's refrain "*Timor mortis conturbat me*" made sense to the most ardent believer, but in the age of Dale Carnegie and Norman Vincent Peale, no right-thinking man or woman had anything to fear. There was no *Dies irae* awaiting mankind, only an air-conditioned retirement complex in St. Petersburg.

Perhaps he was wrong, but each year, as he entered the Christmas season, he was appalled by the irreverence of public celebration. It was not just the cynical exploitation of a Christian holiday by non-Christian retailers—though that was bad enough—but professing Christians joined in the desecration, putting up Christmas decorations at the beginning of Advent, replacing the solemn carols and hymns he had sung in his atheist youth with foolish jingles concocted for megachurch theatricals and degrading the solemn joys of the season with their irreverent billboards that treated the Son of God like some miraculous detergent: "Kmart isn't the only saving place." Is it any wonder that people willing to trivialize the Creator and His Son with every breath they take and every horn they toot—"Honk if you love Jesus"—treat Christmas like one more excuse for a dance party, music provided by Kristal Myers and Hawk Nelson?

Walking down the street one late October day, he noted the yard displays for Halloween, especially the graveyard a family puts up every year with an expanding set of victims: "Tom Buck, he forgot to duck." Silly but harmless, and not so irrelevant as the Santas and reindeer, Frosties and Season's Greetings signs that greeted the birth of Christ. He thought, for some reason, of a truly revolting movie, Tim Burton's *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, in which Jack, the "King of Halloween," decides to displace Santa Claus and take over Christmas. Jack inevitably learns his mistake and restores Santa to his rightful place.

For all he knew, Tim Burton meant no disrespect; he may even have intended a positive message—that love and happiness trump the power of fear—but it is the triumph of Hallmark sentimentality that he celebrates and not Christ's birth and triumph over the grave. The trivialization did not start with Tim Burton or even with the Grinch fable of the leftist propagandist Ted Geisel or the American version of the Santa story, concocted largely by Charles Nast and Frank Baum. Baum's *Wizard of Oz* is a more Christian story, he realized, than *The Life and Adventures of Santa Claus*. Going back still further to a childhood favorite, he began to understand that Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* is a moving and, despite the sentimentalism, largely wholesome fable, but there is hardly an allusion to the real Christmas story, and, such little faith was there in the 19th century, Dickens felt the need to invent his own supernatural characters and events—Marley's ghost and the three ghosts of Christmas—which replace the miracles of the Incarnation, the Annunciation, the Visitation, and the choirs of angels singing, "Peace on earth to men of good will."

The neopagan desecration of Christmas has been matched by a process that turned All Hallows Eve first into a gold mine for candy butchers and dentists and then into a glorification of all that is twisted and perverse. What films do people watch on October 31? It used to be wholesome moral cartoons like the Wolfman and Dracula. Now, people are more likely to watch Michael Myers in *Halloween* or Freddy Krueger in *A Nightmare on Elm Street*. In addition to these examples of tasteful filmmaking, *Reader's Digest* (that bastion of Middle American family values) also recommends *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, *The Silence of the Lambs*, *Night of the Living Dead*, and—for 12 and above—*The Nightmare Before Christmas*. Instead of confronting supernatural evil and defeating it, these films glorify and worship it. Small wonder that decent evangelicals in their confusion have declared war on Halloween, though they might just as well declare war on Christmas, while they are at it.

The ancient pagans, from whom we have borrowed so many of the petty customs and rituals that enrich the Christian calendar, knew that life and death are serious matters. They also understood something basic that we have been trying to forget for centuries, though it is summed up in the Anglican Prayerbook's burial rite (with no apologies to Job):

> Man, that is born of a woman, hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He cometh up, and is cut down, like a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay.
>
> In the midst of life we are in death.

There were pagans who believed in a heaven for the virtuous, but, for the rest, their awareness of life's brevity and the imminence of death gave a richer savor to their experience. *Una nox dormienda*, the poet warned his mistress: There is a night that must be slept forever. A Greek or Roman household was alive with the spirits of the dead, who had to be honored and propitiated. Post-Christians today, in fleeing death, are really denying life, not just the

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life in the here and now, but the abundant life that has been promised to us. We sing (with Miss Peggy Lee), "If that's all there is, my friends, then let's keep dancing. Let's break out the booze and have a ball."

Even otherwise solid Catholic theologians have come to overvalue the here and now to such an extent that they oppose the death penalty. Yes, there are also reasons of prudence and humanity that should give a Christian pause before signing his fellow man's death warrant, but in this age of fear and denial we cannot see much beyond the end of our nose that is said to grow sharp when we are at the point of death. To the arguments of fear whined from every *New York Times* editorial page and preached from every electronic soapbox, we should do as the Pilgrim did when he "put his fingers in his ears and went on crying, 'Life, Life, Eternal Life.'" ◈

Saint-Séverin, I

by Catharine Savage Brosman

Left Bank, Paris

To pass the time, and get another caffeine fix
before the beadle opens up Saint-Séverin,
right at eleven, we sit down on a café terrace, just
across, and order our *express*. Except for bustle
at the doors of tiny restaurants—unloading vegetables,
rinsing down the sidewalks, putting out the chairs
and pocket-sized iron tables—it is very quiet
here, with tourists still in bed, or having coffee

and croissants in their hotel, and not yet ready
for another day of obligations. The only other clients
at this hour are from the neighborhood,
most, I think, *habitués*, one slightly drunk already.
The church is buttressed in my memory: *porche*,
nave, rose window, late Gothic spires, hooking clouds
today—and the cloister, where ten years ago
we drank champagne; and at the prow, breaching

waves of the old town, the apse—rebuilt from rubble
after explosives, sparing the rest, sheared it off
in nineteen-forty-four: low vaulting, mellow
stone, glass of garnet and Aegean blue, a copse
of tracery and branching pillars, and the spiraled lines
of the famous twisted column at the center,
—a sinewy torso by Michelangelo, or a woman
in a swirling gown, cut along the bias, arms lifted,

dancing for the Lord. That May morning, fugue,
toccata, and chorale by Bach leafed out, with sprays
of bridal white and, niched into the great trees
of the nave, greenery like resurrection vine. Tourists
lingered, stared a bit—I heard some whispers
at the side—then ambled on, as the officiant read
the vows, and you two repeated them. Visitors
this time, we'll walk there now, recalling Cana's wine

and benediction, gracious gifts from One who made
life more abundant, whose long torture—nailed
to a denatured tree, his body writhing in great pain—
caused earth to quake, split rocks, extinguished
day, and rent the veil of the old covenant,
until an angel pointed to the bare sarcophagus,
and light restored the world—stone, wood, and bodies
reconciled and whole, all holding heaven's word.

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by Joseph Sobran

Media Bias Revisited

Complaints about "media bias" usually boil down to uninteresting charges that the news media tilt their reportage in favor of one party—usually, but not always, the Democrats. So say the Republicans, with some justice, but put this way the indictment is somewhat superficial. Conservatives more keenly accuse those media of being "liberal"—that is, principled enough to prefer a liberal Republican candidate to a notably corrupt Democrat.

I have studied the news media for many years, from afar and from within, and I know that most journalists do try to be impartial. When they fail, the failure is usually unconscious. The code of political neutrality survives its frequent minor violations.

"The style of your own time is always invisible," the critic Hugh Kenner used to say, citing the true story of a statue, a supposed Etruscan horse that turned out to be a forgery. How was it detected? The 19th-century forger had endowed it with every ancient Etruscan mannerism he could see, Kenner explained, but also with every 19th-century mannerism he (and his contemporaries) couldn't see. Finally, in the mid-20th century, its 19th-century style gradually "rose to visibility," and a keen critical eye urged carbon dating, which confirmed suspicions of its true age.

So what unconscious prejudices of our time are passing largely unnoticed in the media? We can spot at least a few. One of the most striking was displayed in the media frenzy earlier this year over the messianic and "inspirational" candidacy of Barack Obama.

Not all such prejudices are political; the deepest one is perhaps materialism, a view that denies any supernatural authority and supports sexual license. The materialistic version of the theory of evolution enjoys a virtually dogmatic status in the news media, which are quick to trumpet any discovery that seems to confirm it.

I was impressed by one detail in the American coverage of the Olympics in China, which was by no means uncritical. The trouble was that the criticism was limited to the Chinese government's "crackdown on dissent"—deplorable, to be sure, but trivial when compared with its denial of a far more basic freedom: the freedom of the family. Beijing's monstrous conduct in this area is blandly referred to as its "one-child policy."

Policy! You might expect those who call abortion "freedom of choice" to be horrified by forced late-term abortions, but this is not the case. Most abortion advocates say nothing about it; others actually defend the "policy," explaining that, after all, China has a "population problem." I would prefer to suggest that the Chinese population has a "government problem," namely tyranny, but our media don't seem to see it that way.

This old world has always abounded in tyrannies of various sorts, but very few of them have ever thought to restrict the natural right to have children and large families. That area of privacy, at least, has usually gone undisturbed even by otherwise aggressive despotisms.

The most significant thing about this fact is that our news media don't find it shocking. The phrase "reproductive freedom" has become a dishonest euphemism for legalizing feticide, but this most flagrant outrage against the freedom to reproduce gets very little mention. Would Western secularist liberals, who evince indignation far more about restrictions on political dissent than about grisly forced late-term abortions, object very strongly if our putatively democratic regimes adopted similar "policies"?

Our rulers—both actual and would-be—recognize no principled limits on the power of the state. As C.S. Lewis put it, it's no use telling them to mind their own business, for our whole lives are their business. Consider what is now called "sex education," for example: Professedly neutral, it actually encourages children to sin—or in the preferred locution, to be "sexually active"—and to speak the devil's language, which is "value-free" and "nonjudgmental."

Notice how readily the supposedly neutral news media pick up the lingo of the "progressive" side in these moral controversies: *gay*, *choice*, *women's* (meaning "feminists'"), and all the rest. To be "progressive" means to reject Christian standards of sexual morality. (If termites could talk, they would no doubt call what they are doing to the house progress.)

The sexual revolution has taken place not so much in the homosexual bathhouses of San Francisco and Manhattan as in the marriage bed. That is where contraception, abhorred as immoral and revolting by nearly all professed Christians before 1931, is now accepted as normal for married couples. Few Protestants see anything wrong with it; and even most Catholic priests are now too timid to condemn it in the pulpit. (One of the few who did dare to preach against it in my own staid Northern Virginia parish told me he later found his car vandalized. This happened more than two decades ago!)

Contraception, a taboo topic on television within living memory, has achieved such full respectability that today contraceptive products are freely advertised on prime time. Hardly anyone notices anymore. The style of your own time is always invisible.

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Sola Scriptura: The Case for the Crusades

by Hugh Barbour, O.Praem.

"Woe to the Assyrian, he is the rod and the staff of my anger,
and my indignation is in their hands. I will send him to a deceitful nation . . . "
—Isaiah 10:5-6, Douay-Rheims

Confronted by the rise of insurgent Islam and the political reality of *jihad*, many Christians, eager to formulate a response, have turned to the Crusades. Can the rationale for the Crusades be transferred to, or imposed on, the "War on Terror"?

In order to understand the theological case for the Crusades, we must carefully attend to the notion of theological argumentation that obtained in the Middle Ages, setting aside current styles. The perspective of the historian is necessarily ruled out, even if he may discover or collate or provide the texts from which the theological *rationes* are to be culled by the theologian. An approach that makes use of *a posteriori* evidence of what is often abusively called "popular piety" or "ideology" or "propaganda"—or, if we are of a more traditional bent, of a certain positivistic romanticism about Europe and the Christian Faith—will not yield an understanding of what for its preachers was an enterprise logically deducible from the *scientia Dei et beatorum*, "the knowledge of God and the blessed," the authentic expression of which is to be found on the sacred page of Holy Writ.

Theology is both a speculative and a practical science. It is predominantly speculative, since it regards truths that are immutable, metaphysical, and supernatural, but it is also practical, since theology treats as well the means of arriving at the permanent possession of the immutable things contemplated. In his lessons on the First Book of Peter Lombard's *Sentences*, St. Thomas Aquinas tells us that if theology were merely speculative it would concern only the present, but since it also considers the practical way to attain happiness, it concerns the future as well—the resolutions to be made and the actions to be undertaken in order for wayfarers to become possessors of everlasting bliss.

A certain kind of contemporary "theology" now in decline has, under the aegis of Heidegger, seen theology as a work of historical interpretation, set on God as the "ultimate future" of man. There is no place for the sort of initiative that seeks to place human society under the sway of an objective revelation, which is always present and immutable, atemporal and transcendent. Instead, it speaks only to the men of this time of the things of this time. It has no place for crusades, but it also has no place for universal creeds or catechisms, as Karl Rahner makes clear in his vesperal résumé of his own thought, *Foundations of Christian Faith*.

The "ultimate future" of medieval theology, on the other hand, is always an absolute and realized present; it is the historical future that is concretely relative, determined simply by whether or not men take up the means given them by God to arrive at the perfection and bliss of the heavenly society already established with the creation of the angels.

How do men determine what these means are? By examining the authoritative text of the Bible. We who are heirs of the Reformation or the Counter-Reformation can scarcely appreciate, albeit perhaps for different reasons depending on our allegiance to the one or the other, the serene conviction of the medieval Catholic theologian, and in the first place of Saint Thomas, that all theological reasoning, to the extent that its conclusions are certain and undoubted, must be resolved to the first principles of this queen of the sciences—namely, to the words of Sacred Scripture. In the same *lectura romana* on the *Sentences* cited above, Saint Thomas answers the question whether the writings of the saints (of the Fathers most especially) may be used in theological reasoning. His answer is a very qualified *sic*, "yes," coming close to a formal *non*, "no":

> In the case of theology, in the place of the principles which are self-evident there are the rules and articles of faith which are handed down (*traduntur*) in the canonical scriptures, and therefore the arguments which proceed from them take the place of demonstration. The arguments of the saints on the other hand are like probable reasonings, whence it is permitted to use them, not as establishing a necessary argument, but as providing a certain probability. Only those things which pertain to the rule of faith handed down in the canonical scripture impose the necessity in matters of faith.

We may know of the example of the saints, we may know the historical progress of the Crusades, but do we know

Father Hugh is prior of St. Michael's Abbey at Trabuco Canyon, California.

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the reasons whereby those who undertook the Crusades were persuaded beyond a doubt that they were justified and, indeed, obligatory? For them, the Crusades were not a matter of historical interpretation, a culturally self-conscious analysis, but a serene and immediate practical resolution to be undertaken because the Word of God demands it.

"And he changeth times and ages: taketh away kingdoms and establisheth them." In his July 1091 crusade bull for the reconquest of Tarragona in Spain and in an October 1098 letter to Bishop Gerland of Agrigento, Pope Urban II makes use of this passage from the Vulgate version of Daniel to explain the success of the Christian reconquest of Sicily by the Normans. In the latter letter he links the passage from Daniel to the first chapter of Ephesians, which tells of the marvelous summing up of all things in Christ "according to the purpose of his will."

A medieval pope would not have consulted a concordance for a proof text but would have known the whole context of a citation and its implications. The reference to Daniel is from the time of the pagan conquest of Jerusalem and the captivity of the chosen people in a context containing a prophecy of Christ the Virgin-born who would establish an everlasting kingdom. And this is linked to a New Testament parallel found in Saint Paul's praise of the divine plan in Ephesians 1, in which "God's will and purpose" is precisely "in the dispensation of the fullness of times to reestablish all things in Christ, that are in heaven and in earth in him."

With this scriptural reasoning, Urban offers the most theologically lofty rationale for a crusade—the divine plan of bringing everything into subjection to Christ, which is the dogmatic key for understanding human history—a rationale that includes even the evil which the Crusades had been undertaken to confront. This is an eschatological perspective, but it is one that governs the whole arc of human history viewed in the light of the Incarnation of the Word. It is not only something to be realized at the end of time but a principle of understanding and Christian initiative at every time.

This same Urban II's famous and variously reported sermon at Clermont (1095) is nothing but a conscious application of the words of Scripture—about Jerusalem and the course of history until the coming of the Antichrist—to the Pope's proposal of what became the First Crusade. From Urban's chain of arguments taken from the Gospels, the epistles, from the prophets, psalms, and historical books, the Christian can only conclude that the Holy City must be defended and restored.

Long before Clermont, Hildebrand (Pope Gregory VII) had offered cogent Johannine reasoning for undertaking the crusade to the East: Because Christ laid down His life for us, we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. Indeed, the *sequela* or *imitatio Christi* forms an immediate and powerful argument.

From the Fifth Crusade and following, the model sermons of James of Vitry, Odo of Chateauroux, and Humbert of the Romans are an elaboration on these themes, but they maintain the strictly scriptural reasoning. They are more subtle, more complex, and more focused on the spiritual struggle implied by taking up the cross. Here is a deeper theology, developing the notion of the crusade as a personal conformity to Christ, as a work of conversion of heart with the expectation of spiritual benefits. The liberation of the Church in the East and the reestablishment of the Christian people is still the rationale, but its ascetic and mystical import are now clearly in the forefront, with the hope of a heavenly kingdom predominating over the success in time of the Church Militant. The focus is more on the crusader than on the crusade.

Melanie Anderson

James of Vitry was a master of Paris, deeply involved in the reform of the clergy as well as the domestic crusade against the Albigensians. He was made bishop of Acre and accompanied the Fifth Crusade to Damietta. Later, on his return to Europe, he was made cardinal-bishop of Tusculum.

In one sermon he expounds a text of the Apocalypse—itself based on the prophecy of Ezekiel about the "*tau*," the cross, as the "sign of the living God." The contrast between hearing the words of the preacher now and responding to them in due time *versus* neglecting them is dramatically presented: "Those who do not want to hear the gentle whisper of preaching, at least let them hear the great shout of the Crucified, otherwise they will hear the thunderclap of His terrifying voice: 'Depart from me, you accursed!'"

It is precisely Christ crucified to whom the crusader is to be conformed, for He was the first *crucesignatus*. James poignantly compares Christ's being signed with the cross by the soldiers' nails and bearing the marks of the cross in the holy sepulcher with the "cross which is fixed to your cloaks with a soft thread." Christ is in fact the true friend who, according to Solomon, will prove Himself in adversity; can the hearers of this sermon resist returning the favor? The contrast between the threat of the destructive

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angelic ministry and the judgment of the crucified Christ on the Last Day, on the one hand, and the touching presentation of the generous renunciation of Christ and His fellow cross-bearers who have become true friends, on the other, is incomparably grand but not merely rhetorical; it is grounded in the words of John the Divine and the wise King Solomon.

Odo of Chateauroux succeeded James of Vitry as cardinal-bishop of Tusculum, accompanying Saint Louis to the East as papal *legatus a latere*. He was a most prolific composer of sermons, perhaps the most prolific of the 13th century, leaving well over a thousand manuscript sermons in collections.

The "ultimate future" of medieval theology is the historical future that is concretely relative, determined simply by whether or not men take up the means given them by God to arrive at the perfection and bliss of the heavenly society already established. How do men determine what these means are? By examining the authoritative text of the Bible. We who are heirs of the Reformation or the Counter-Reformation can scarcely appreciate the serene conviction of the medieval Catholic theologian that all theological reasoning must be resolved to the words of Sacred Scripture.

Odo offers us one of the few crusade sermons occasioned by a particular feast of the Church calendar—in this case, the Conversion of Saint Paul (January 25). The scriptural authority for the sermon is Matthew 19, understood in medieval moral theology as referring to the religious life under vows in a community, since the Apostles, on the testimony of Acts 2, had lived the common life. Here it is boldly applied to such laymen as would take up the cross, leaving everything to follow Christ. To accomplish this there must be a profound conversion of heart, akin to Saint Paul's, a conversion to a pure, burning love effected by the Incarnation of the Son of God. Saint Paul teaches us to run so as to obtain (or to catch) the prize, and the prize is Christ Himself. The examples of Abraham, Peter, Jonathan, and Mathathias are given. The sermon is a magnificent, tender, virile composition.

Humbert of the Romans was master general of the Dominicans. He did not himself engage in the preaching of the crusade, but he directed the brethren in this apostolate and composed a manual for the instruction of preachers. These texts are little more than sketches for the preacher to amplify. Even so, the witness of the saints of the Old and New Testaments as narrated in the panegyric of Hebrews 11 is brought forward. The indulgence of the crusade is given as an eminent motivation to the listener.

This indulgence is far more ancient than it is ordinarily thought to be. Already in the years immediately preceding Clermont, it had been offered to those who would fight in the reconquest of Spain and Sicily. Much earlier still, in the ninth century, Pope John VIII had granted what modern interpreters accept as a true indulgence, given at the beginning of its medieval development. The bishops of the realm of Louis II, the Stammerer, had written the Pope asking about the fate of those who died fighting the Muslims. The Pope replies with authorities from Ezekiel ("In whatever hour a sinner shall be converted, I will remember his sins no longer") and from Saint Luke's Gospel ("This day thou shalt be with me in paradise"). The first plenary indulgence was offered by Christ Himself! The Pope continues, "We, by our Humility, in so far as it is right and needful, and by the intercession of Blessed Peter the Apostle whose power is to bind and loose in heaven and on earth, absolve the aforesaid [crusaders] and commend them to God in our prayers."

No single aspect of the Crusades has had more impact on the development of theology and pastoral practice than the grant of the indulgence. The current discipline is its outgrowth through the various bulls of the crusade. These bulls, in turn, affected the manner in which indulgences and other privileges were granted in the rest of the Church, until the largesse given once only to the crusaders was extended to all. After the definitive victory of the Turks, the good work of the crusade was replaced by other good works: the giving of alms to the poor, or to seminarians, or for the ransom of Christian slaves from the Barbary pirates. The Church began to extend the indulgence to the building of bridges, hospitals, and hostels, as well as of places of worship. Even the Eastern Orthodox patriarchates under the Ottomans maintained the grant of indulgences into the 19th and 20th centuries, sending procurators (mostly into Russia and Rumania) to bestow commutations of penance on those who would donate for the upkeep of the holy places.

The doctrine of indulgences requires many of the principal dogmas of the Catholic religion to be distilled into concrete practice, and so it is not for nothing that Luther chose this as the locus for the inauguration of his dissent. Unless a man is deeply concerned with his own spiritual struggle and equally conscious of the Christian society into which he is incorporated by Baptism, he will not concern himself with indulgences, which are about temporal struggle in view of the Kingdom of Heaven. This is the very essence of the theological foundation of the Crusades, which shines on every page of Holy Writ. The Lutheran understanding of justification and its critique of indulgences is perhaps also a critique of a spiritual and temporal polity in which crusades could be justified and undertaken. This is another approach, which, like the Catholic one, claims to be resolved *sola scriptura*, for Luther bases himself on Isaiah 10 when he says that "To fight against the Turk is the same as resisting God, who visits our sin upon us with this rod of his anger." ◇

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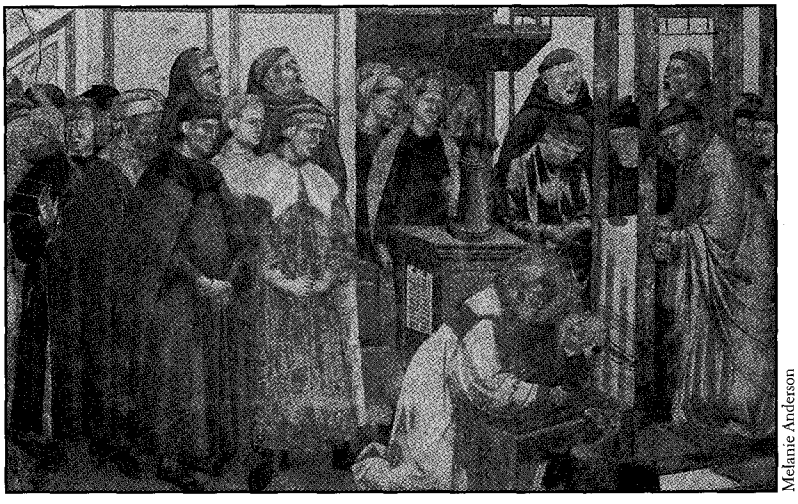
How to Win the War Against Christmas

Remembering How We Got Here

by Tom Piatak



Melanie Anderson

In the seven years since my first essay on the War Against Christmas appeared in *Chronicles*, I have had no trouble writing at least one such essay per year, because each year brings new and outrageous attempts to suppress the public celebration of Christmas. My favorite example was the 2002 winner of *VDare.com*'s invaluable War Against Christmas Competition that I analyzed in *The American Conservative* in Christmas 2003. The Columbus, Ohio, schools banned a performance of Handel's *Messiah*, which for the previous nine years had been the highlight of the year at a specialized school for the arts. The performance would have violated the district's religious-music policy, which came into being as the result of an ACLU lawsuit. According to the *Columbus Dispatch*, the policy stipulated that the proportion of religious music performed in concert be no more than 30 percent and that the performance of religious music be "based on sound curricular reasons" and not "manifest a preference for religion or particular religious beliefs." The educational bureaucrats who devised the policy, trying to be helpful, suggested the students perform "Frosty the Snowman" or "Jingle Bells" instead of Handel. Their ignorance and philistinism are appalling, though characteristic of those waging the War Against Christmas. After hearing *Messiah* performed in London, Haydn was moved to exclaim that "Handel is the master of us all!" and to write his own great oratorio, *The Creation*. But, in today's climate of "sensitivity" and "tolerance," beauty and artistic merit are scarcely a sufficient warrant for exposing delicate ears to the name of Christ.

Contributing editor Tom Piatak writes from Cleveland, Ohio.

This example, precisely because it is so appalling, gives us a clear idea of what is at stake in the War Against Christmas. As I wrote in the *American Conservative*, "The result of sanitizing Christmas is now within sight: an undistinguished, uninspiring public celebration, devoid of religious or cultural significance or indeed of beauty, with nothing left but multiculturalist pap and tawdry commercialism." The War Against Christmas is a part of the larger war against the heritage of the West. It goes by such names as "multiculturalism," "political correctness," and "cultural Marxism" and seeks to destroy the traditional culture of the West and, ultimately, the West itself. Although embittered atheists are often shock troops in the War Against Christmas, the hostility to religion is noticeably selective: The public celebration in America of Hanukkah, Ramadan, and Diwali as faux-Christmases (even though the Islamic lunar calendar is taking Ramadan further and further away from December) has never been more pronounced. This is not happening by accident, nor is it restricted to America. As the *Daily Mail* reported on November 1, 2007, a Labour think tank had urged that Christmas be "downgraded" as part of an "urgent and upfront campaign" to promote a "multicultural understanding of Britishness," and part of this campaign is the elevation of non-Christian holidays with temporal proximity to Christmas.

However, none of this is irreversible. As I wrote on *VDare.com* during Christmas in 2003, there are several mundane steps that would help in the effort to make Christmas again a time for joyous and beautiful public celebration. We need to let movie studios, retailers, school boards, and politicians know that those of us who love Christmas vastly outnum-

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ber the malcontents, and that we do not appreciate what has happened to the public celebration of our holiday. We need, in essence, a new Legion of Decency, an organization that helped ensure both that Hollywood did not make movies assaulting Christmas and that it made movies that celebrated Christmas, including such classics from Hollywood's Golden Age as *It's a Wonderful Life*, *Miracle on 34th Street*, *The Bishop's Wife*, and *The Bells of St. Mary's*, the movie being shown in Bedford Falls as George Bailey runs down its snowy streets on Christmas Eve. Boycotting bad movies works. Last year Hollywood celebrated Christmas by releasing *The Golden Compass*, a movie based on Philip Pullman's atheist children's trilogy. Once word got out about who Pullman was and what he believed, the movie tanked at the U.S. box office, and it is now unlikely that the two planned sequels will ever be made.

The indisputable cultural significance of Christmas should sweep aside any fair-minded objections to its public celebration and reveal those who still object to be motivated by a hatred of Christianity or of the West, as indeed many of those waging the War Against Christmas are.

Numbers are surely on our side. Polls show that up to 96 percent of Americans celebrate Christmas. This effort need not be entirely negative—even though some polite, forceful complaining will be necessary. We can start wishing others "Merry Christmas" again. We can buy only cards that mention Christmas and let both the retailer and the card maker know why we are doing that. On our Christmas cards that actually mention Christmas we can make a point of using only the USPS's Christmas stamp, and we can tell them why we prefer that stamp to the generic "Season's Greetings" alternative. (Indeed, only a popular outcry saved the Christmas stamp from the p.c. chopping block in the mid-1990's.) We can patronize retailers who actually mention the holiday that is the source of their good fortune and tell them why we prefer to shop there. We can also share essays on the War Against Christmas with our friends and relatives: People are much more likely to act when they realize they are not alone, and others have expressed sentiments they share but have been reluctant to voice.

At a deeper level, we need to cultivate the traditions that make Christmas special in our own homes, churches, and communities. From an early age, I learned from what I saw and experienced that the gifts brought by Santa were only a tiny part of the reason why Christmas was special. It was when our home looked special, when we brought out ornaments we had cherished for years, and some my dad had kept from his childhood, to put on our tree; when we ate the same dinner on Christmas Eve that our family had eaten for centuries; and when we listened to some of the exquisite music inspired by Christmas, including the beautiful Polish carols I have loved my whole life and the music my uncle and my cousin's wife played for us on the cello and violin at our Christmas Eve dinner. Such things did not happen anytime else during the year, and they helped instill in me a lasting love for Christmas and a desire to learn about and experience more facets of the celebration of Christmas.

In cultivating the traditions of Christmas, we are also being nourished by some of the deepest wellsprings of Western civilization. Over the course of centuries, the celebration of Christmas became splendid and multifaceted, a testament to the genius of our civilization and a holiday that, because of its cultural significance, can be and is enjoyed even by those who do not believe in Christ. As Paula Simons, a non-Christian, wrote in the *Edmonton Journal* five years ago,

> Traditional Christmas carols are beautiful songs. They combine rich, lyric poetry with melodies of timeless power. A child who grows up hearing and singing the likes of God Rest Ye, Merry Gentlemen or Silent Night . . . or the other great world classics gets a profound musical education. The intricate harmonies and modalities of real carols don't just move our hearts. They train our ears to appreciate more sophisticated musical forms and our voices to sing in concert with others.

She is exactly right. No other festival has inspired even a tiny fraction of such great music. For those seeking a bright-line test on how to treat competing winter holidays, I have suggested equal emphasis on all winter holidays which have had music written for them by Johann Sebastian Bach. And Simons' comments point to yet another way the War Against Christmas can be won.

Christmas is, of course, a celebration of the birth of Christ and the mystery of the Incarnation. But it is also the celebration that most helped shape the West. As Thomas Cahill explains in his *Mysteries of the Middle Ages*,

> Roman Christians found their attention drawn to the most down-to-earth aspect of the Trinitarian doctrine: the Infleshing, the Incarnation, the Making of the God-Man. What, they asked themselves, are the practical consequences—to human beings—of the Word becoming Flesh? From this question will flow, with some notable divagations, the main course of what was to become Western Christianity.

Although Roman Christians "agreed in principle" with their Greek coreligionists that Easter was the "supreme Christian feast," "in practice they came to prefer Christmas." And this preference for Christmas had profound consequences.

Cahill tells the charming story of how Saint Francis of Assisi created the first crèche at Midnight Mass in Greccio. In the words of Saint Bonaventure, Francis "made ready a

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manger, and bade hay, together with an ox and an ass, be brought unto the place." Cahill particularly focuses on why the saint did this: "I wish to make a memorial of that child who was born in Bethlehem and, as far as possible, behold with bodily eyes the hardships of his infant state, lying on hay in a manger with the ox and the ass standing by." By trying to recreate "as far as possible" what had happened in Bethlehem, Francis had, according to Cahill, asked a "wholly new question," a question that was "historical, emotional, particular, and human: what would it have been like to be there?" This emphasis on realism, so different from the Christian iconography that characterized Eastern religious art, meant that "In the town of Greccio on Christmas night in 1223 were born the arts as we still know them."

A generation later, Giotto, "throughout his adult life a Franciscan tertiary," painted that scene in Greccio in fresco in the magnificent basilica built to commemorate Francis in Assisi, and the first Christmas is part of his equally famous frescoes in the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua. Giotto's

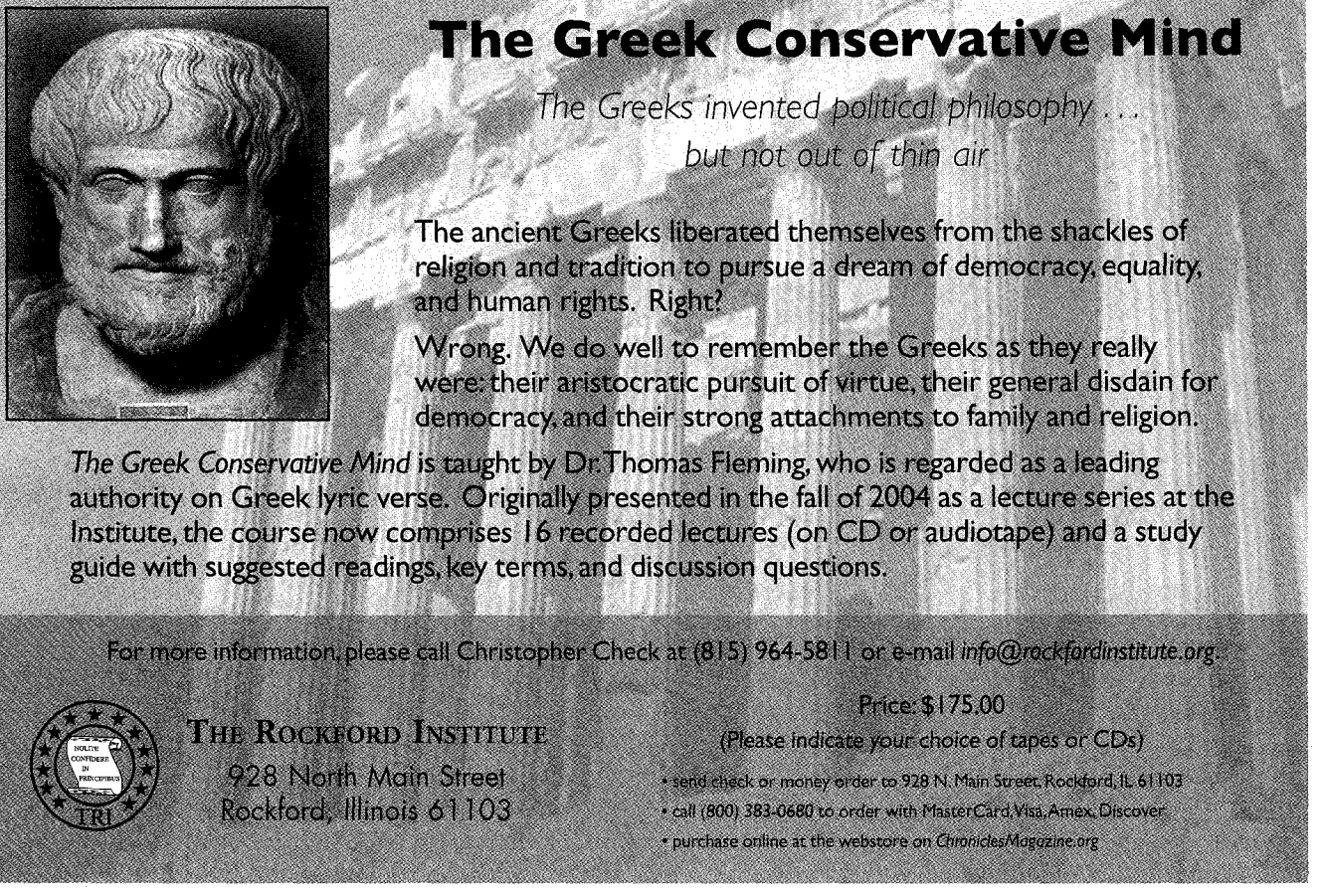
> eucharistic Catholicism, informed by a Franciscan spirit, pushed him toward a nearly scientific quest to reproduce more exactingly in art the very things his eyes could see, his hands could touch, his heart could love—and preeminently among these lovable things was the human body itself.

And this realism, grounded in the incarnational theology of the Western Church, had a profound impact:

> [Giotto's] work is done. His influence on generations to come, whether direct or indirect, on sculptors as well as painters, on Renaissance and modern artists as well as late-medieval ones—on Pisano, Ghiberti, Donatello, the Della Robbias, Fra Angelico, Masaccio, Piero della Francesca, and Mantegna, on the inevitable trio of Leonardo, Michelangelo, and Raphael, and perhaps especially on that most inspired supernaturalist Caravaggio—will be immeasurable. . . . And that is how life became art.

Thus, it is no exaggeration to state that the Western artistic tradition is inextricably linked to the celebration of Christmas.

We should never tire of emphasizing this, and of reminding those who wish to "downgrade" Christmas of all they are denigrating. The indisputable cultural significance of Christmas should sweep aside any fair-minded objections to its public celebration and reveal those who still object to be motivated by a hatred of Christmas or of Christianity or of the West, as indeed many of those waging the War Against Christmas are. If the War Against Christmas is to be won, it will be by remembering who we are and how we got here, and by summoning the courage to defend the great legacy bequeathed us by those who went before. ◈


The Greek Conservative Mind
The Greeks invented political philosophy . . .
but not out of thin air
The ancient Greeks liberated themselves from the shackles of religion and tradition to pursue a dream of democracy, equality, and human rights. Right?
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Muslim Pressure and Christian Appeasement

The British Retreat as the Muslims Advance

by Christie Davies

From time to time I go to Oxford, the city of dreaming spires, the home of what Gladstone called "the God-fearing and God-sustaining University of Oxford." For Catholics it is revered as the home of Cardinal Newman, that most human and subtle of converts, and for Protestants it is the place of the Martyrs Memorial to Bishops Cranmer, Latimer, and Ridley, who were burned at the stake. But the last time I went there, I was confronted by a tall, gaunt man with a straggly black beard proffering Muslim tracts from a stall on trestles in the center of the city. Two of them had provocative titles: "Crucifixion or Cruci-*fiction*?" and "Resurrection or Resuscitation?" I selected these and asked him his price. "They are free," he replied, "but you can make a contribution towards the furthering of Muslim education in Britain." I gave him a tuppence, worth a little under five cents. Given the nature of the cause, perhaps it was a little overgenerous of me.

As I continued on my way I thought to myself how offensive those titles must have been to truly committed Christians. In the form of a cheap and derisive pun, they were a direct and mocking attack on the central event and the central doctrine of the Christian religion. In Britain, where, despite the efforts of our government to curtail them, freedom of speech and freedom of religion still exist, the Muslims have every right to their stall and their vile literature. What is more disturbing is that Christians are not able to press their views in the same way. Any evangelists who set themselves up in a predominantly Muslim neighborhood to distribute literature denouncing the heresies of the Koran and the false prophet Muhammad would be "moved on" by the police, lest public order be disturbed. The police do not have the power to do this, as the case of *Beatty* v. *Gillbanks* (1882) confirmed, and a determined evangelist could refuse to budge. However, the Muslims might well assault the determined Christians, and the police have neither the resources nor the political will to protect them. Local Muslim politicians would denounce this "provocation," whereas Christian priests and ministers have nothing to say when Muslims proselytize in an offensive way. The police would probably tell the Christians that they were obstructing the highway, and the local authorities would certainly not give them a permit to set up a temporary stall in a strongly Muslim area. The Christians lose out because they are peaceable and because the authorities wish to appease a fractious Muslim population. The Muslims also enjoy all the privileges afforded to alien minorities in a society that is uncertain of itself and where local government is often in the hands of leftists who hate Britain's Christian traditions.

The pamphlets themselves were more reasonably worded than their titles suggested, but they referred to a mysterious Gospel of Barnabas, of which I had never heard. I went out and bought a copy (published in New Delhi and also in Leicester) at an Islamic bookshop and later consulted more scholarly and accurate accounts. The Gospel of Barnabas is a shameless Muslim forgery; the internal evidence shows that it could not have existed at the time of the early Church and was probably composed in the 16th century. (There is no reference to it anywhere before this time, though the Muslims confuse it with the apocryphal Epistle of Barnabas, written by a contemporary of Saint Paul.) It is meant to undermine from within the most distinctive aspects of the Christian religion and to reduce Jesus to the status of a secondary prophet whose main function was to pave the way for Muhammad. The book that the Muslims peddle was translated from a manuscript in Vienna's Imperial Library by the scholars Lonsdale and Laura Ragg. The Muslims have cunningly stripped out the notes and comments it must once have had, and they have added utterly mendacious commentaries of their own. The editors have the impudence to present this despicable volume to the world as a gesture of goodwill to Christians.

You would think that the leaders of the Anglican Church would denounce such an outrageous forgery and perhaps even remind us of the identity of the father of lies who must have inspired it. Yet only marginal Christian groups and those suffering persecution at the hands of Muslims have spoken out. The great majority of senior churchmen prefer to avoid all controversy and confrontation, even though the vigorous defense of their Faith against the Muslim heresy should be their first duty.

The one gallant exception is the Rev. Dr. Michael James Nazir-Ali, bishop of Rochester. Born in Karachi, the son of a Christian convert, and formerly bishop of Raimund in Pakistan, Bishop Nazir-Ali knows far better than his fellow Anglican bishops what the Muslims are really like. By contrast we find the Archbishop of Canterbury wringing his hands and stating that the doctrine of the Trinity

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Christie Davies is the author of
The Strange Death of Moral Britain.

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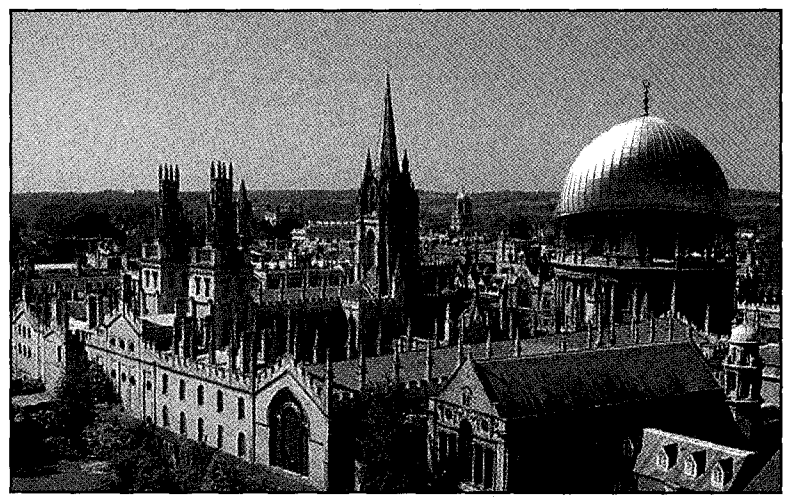
is "difficult, sometimes offensive to Muslims." Why raise this point at all when dealing with the Muslims? The Trinity is not intrinsically difficult to grasp. Even the Irish came fervently to believe in it after the great Welsh missionary Saint Patrick explained it using a shamrock. The important thing is never to accept that the Trinity is or can be regarded as a puzzle, for that leads to playing with formulae that invite speculation as to how one person of the Trinity proceeds from another. Mysteries should never be treated as puzzles. The archbishop would do better to remember that the violent Muslim conquests of the Middle East and the Balkans were facilitated by Christian schisms over the precise nature of the Trinity. Now it is Britain that is at stake.

Why does it concern the archbishop that sometimes Muslims find the doctrine of the Trinity offensive? His duty is to proclaim it regardless—and indeed in defiance—of Muslim opinion. Why does he not tell the Muslims bluntly that he finds the Koran offensive because it is a tendentious garbling of the elements of the Bible and a denial and downgrading of his own religion's central doctrines? It is his Christian duty to be peaceable and charitable to others and not to seek revenge or escalate conflicts, but this does not extend to avoiding confronting with requisite firmness those whose faith is at odds with his own. Where the Muslims are concerned, it is time for the archbishop to fight the good fight, not to hold cozy ecumenical chats with Muslim leaders.

When the Muslims are running scared, either because of the public outcry against terrorism or because they fear the aggressive secularism of modern Britain, they will stress that they revere "Jesus" as a prophet. When left-wing municipalities have tried to undermine the religious celebration of Christmas in institutions under their control, they are surprised to find that they are opposed by the Muslims. Muslim behavior in this respect is self-interested; Christians will never get any such backing from them over Easter. In the face of rising unpopularity, they speak of the "Abrahamic religions," which, of course, includes the Jews. It sits ill with the notorious antisemitism of the descendants of that wild ass Ishmael, whose hand was against every man, but British church leaders like its implied inclusiveness. One of the British theologians countenancing this spurious rapprochement says in private that he does not believe that Abraham ever existed. Why can't these liberal "Christian" theologians in endowed university positions, who have devoted so much of their time to corroding the foundations of their own religion, be redeployed to undermine Islam? Can't their knowledge of Semitic languages, their skill in and penchant for undermining sacred texts, and their ruthlessly destructive powers of analysis be targeted on the Koran and on Muslim tradition? What is the point of men who look at the mote in the eye of their own religion though magnifying glasses but are unwilling to observe and criticize the beam in the eye of Islam? Christianity in Britain has two sets of critics: the Muslims and the liberal theologians. As a religion and as a set of texts, Islam has no critics at all.

The archbishop's other folly has been to suggest that the coming of *sharia* is inevitable in Britain. It is difficult to know exactly what he meant by this, since he is incapable of speaking with any degree of clarity and is always restating his views in a new muddled way that contradicts his initial muddle, but he was a fool to have expressed any opinion on the subject at all. *Sharia* in fact already exists in Britain in the same way that rabbinical courts exist; they can grant a *get*, a Jewish divorce, or settle disputes within the Orthodox Jewish community by arbitration. No one from outside interferes. Indeed, unless it is contrary to equity or the public interest, even most secular disputes can be settled by arbitration. It is often better, faster, and cheaper than lawyers and British courts. It is widely used in the shipping industry to settle claims. If that is all the Muslims want, they already have it, just as they are permitted to operate Islamic financial institutions that, in theory at least, do not charge interest on loans or pay interest to depositors. Likewise a Muslim who wishes his children to inherit his estate in keeping with Islamic principles—for example, so that sons inherit considerably more than daughters—has merely to write his will in line with them. After causing an initial uproar, the archbishop later implied that this is what he was referring to all along. But that was not the impression he gave at the time.



Melanie Anderson

Will he one day approve of a state that forces Muslim British citizens to use *sharia* and Muslims to draw up their wills in conformity with it? Will he want to prevent aggrieved heirs from contesting a will made under *sharia*, perhaps acrimoniously, perhaps even speaking of temporary insanity, if they feel that it was made under duress from the Muslim community? Will he want to exempt Muslim men who have obtained a Muslim divorce from obtaining a civil divorce before they can remarry? At present, Jews may find that they have a valid religious divorce but cannot legally remarry because a financial settlement

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has not been reached in the civil action. Catholic spouses can be divorced in a civil action without their consent, but in the eyes of the Church, the Catholic will still need a proper annulment. If a Catholic doctor were to refuse a patient an abortion and decline to refer her to a doctor who will do it, and the patient dies in consequence, he can be charged with manslaughter. In such a world, why should the practices of the Muslims be afforded a privileged status?

Does the archbishop want Britain to fragment into separate committees, each with its own code of personal law, and to see the primacy of the English Common Law and British statutes undermined because that is what the Muslims demand? The archbishop now says that he does not, but is this not the most reasonable interpretation of his original woolly statement? What is he going to say now that Somali Muslims' *sharia* courts preside over cases of criminal violence and award compensation to the victim (who may well be a non-Muslim), to be paid by the perpetrator's community in return for the victim not pressing charges? What is he going to say about the way British *sharia* courts settle cases of domestic violence in secret to stop a badly injured wife from going to the police? What will happen if there is a murder and the victim's relatives are offered blood money, as happens in Muslim countries? Is the maintenance of the Queen's peace to be treated as irrelevant? Are we to discard the idea that a crime of violence is a crime not just against the victim but against the social order?

The continuity and supremacy of the English Common Law has long been part of Britain's identity and implicit constitution. It is already being eroded by the willingness of Britain's politicians to sign international treaties that then take precedence, something the United States has wisely avoided. Is what remains to be cast away to appease the Muslims' impudent demand for *sharia*, a demand that reflects their potentially treasonable adhesion to the *ummah*, the worldwide community of Muslims, rather than to the country whose citizenship they hold and whose privileges they exploit? How can we tolerate the fragmentation of our laws to appease those who claim that theirs come directly from that which they call Allah?

Michael Nazir-Ali, the bishop of Rochester, has spoken out concerning those Muslim districts in England where Christians are subjected to intimidation. Muslim converts to Christianity have had their houses attacked, and churches and Hindu temples are both at risk. When the victims complain to the local bishop, he is not willing to defend them and indeed does his best to hush things up. In the end they may be driven out by the Muslims who will then enjoy the religious apartheid that is their ideal. The native people who flee the area are then denounced by the liberal media as being the ones at fault. The bishop of Rochester has been sent death threats by Muslims and is under police protection; that is the Muslims' way of showing that Islam is a religion of peace. He has also been denounced by the Canterbury clique, for they know that the archbishop's priority is Christian-Muslim "dialogue."

The other great appeaser is Prince Charles, who is next in line as *Fidei Defensor*. Back in 1994, the Prince declared that he wishes to be known not as "Defender of the Faith" but as "Defender of Faith." Since the Jews have not criticized the present arrangements and already say their own prayers for the Queen as head of state, and given that it is unlikely that the Prince wishes to be the defender of Britain's numerous idol worshipers, it is clearly one more case of appeasing the Muslims. Will the Archbishop of Canterbury accept Charles' abandonment of the religion of the church of which he will nominally be the head when he takes his Coronation Oath? Does Charles really think that all faiths are the same, and does that sameness cover, as Linus says to Charlie Brown, "Christian Science and Melanesian frog-worship"? Does the Prince think that all faiths are equally valid? Given his long and adulterous affair with Camilla, the wife of Mr. Andrew Parker-Bowles, it is difficult to understand Charles' concern for pleasing the Muslims, whose *sharia* would have punished him with a hundred lashes, stoning, or beheading.

I hope I have not been unfair to the Archbishop of Canterbury, who is described by those who know him well as a pious, kindly, and gifted man. But he must learn the virtues of clarity and silence. I appreciate the fact that English may not be his first language and that the Welsh are a voluble people, but that is no excuse. Likewise, my attack on the Muslims does not apply to all British Muslims, most of whom are not fanatics and simply want a quiet life. The problem is that Britain's Muslims have a high "nutter factor"; the proportion of them who are intolerant, fanatical, and obsessed with their own interests and supremacy is far higher than that among Britain's Christians, or indeed Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, Parsees, and Bahais. The great sin of the majority of Muslims is that they will not distance themselves from and denounce the crazies in their midst with sufficient ferocity and vigor. Christian appeasement makes this problem much worse. It is time that Christians firmly match the Muslims in their willingness to engage in religious controversy. If they do not, they will go under, and so will truth, toleration, and freedom.

In the town where I live, the Muslims have been granted permission to build a four-million-pound mosque on prime land, which was donated to them by our socialistic local council at the expense of the taxpayers, most of whom are not Muslims and many of whom are antagonistic to Islam. The Muslims of the town are penurious and will not be able to raise that kind of money. They will almost certainly have to ask some Saudi foundation for the money, and the Saudis will only pay if the local Muslims agree to allow the new mosque to be a beachhead for Wahhabism. When completed, the silver dome atop the mosque will be higher than all the churches in the town. It is a metaphor for our times.

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The Cold War Never Ended

U.S.-Russian Relations Since September 11

by Joseph E. Fallon

The recent invasion of South Ossetia by the U.S.-trained and -equipped Georgian army turned into a debacle for both Tbilisi and Washington. It also demonstrated that, for the U.S. government, the fall of the Soviet Union on December 8, 1991, did not mean the Cold War had ended. Washington simply shifted focus to the newly independent Russian Federation and continued its Cold War policy of "containment." Because of Russia's size, both geographic and demographic, and her natural resources and nuclear weapons, Washington believed that Russia had to be kept politically and economically weak through containment or she would again emerge as America's rival and a constraint on U.S. foreign policy. The Soviet regime had translated *containment* as *strangulation*. Given the nature of the policies pursued by the Bush administration toward Russia over the last seven years, the latter is perhaps a more appropriate term.

The most dramatic evidence of this strategy came after September 11. Through its declared Global War on Terror, the Bush administration used military alliances and military bases (ostensibly to fight Islamic jihadists) to surround Russia, even though Russia had nothing to do with the terrorist attacks on America and was, herself, fighting an Islamic insurgency in Chechnya.

The intellectual justification for what became the Bush administration's post-September 11 policy of containment was articulated in 1997 by Dr. Zbigniew Brzezinski in *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*. Dr. Brzezinski, who has served Democratic and Republican presidents, is described by the mainstream media as a political realist. Yet the ideas expressed in his book formed the basis of the neocon agenda pursued by the Bush administration toward Russia.

Brzezinski assumed that, following the breakup of the Soviet Union, Washington gained effective control over Eurasia. Thus,

> how America "manages" Eurasia is critical. A power that dominates Eurasia would control two of the world's three most advanced and economically productive regions. A mere glance at the map also suggests that control over Eurasia would almost automatically entail Africa's subordination, rendering the Western Hemisphere and Oceania geopolitically peripheral to the world's central continent. About 75 per cent of the world's people live in Eurasia, and most of the world's physical wealth is there as well, both in its enterprises and underneath its soil. Eurasia accounts for about three-fourths of the world's known energy resources.

The last two sentences are key.

Brzezinski is also advisor to several major corporations and believes control of Eurasia's wealth, especially its oil and natural-gas reserves, should be a focus of U.S. policy.

> The world's energy consumption is bound to vastly [*sic*] increase over the next two or three decades. Estimates by the U.S. Department of Energy anticipate that world demand will rise by more than 50 percent between 1993 and 2015, with the most significant increase in consumption occurring in the Far East. The momentum of Asia's economic development is already generating massive pressures for the exploration and exploitation of new sources of energy and the Central Asian region and the Caspian Sea basin are known to contain reserves of natural gas and oil that dwarf those of Kuwait, the Gulf of Mexico, or the North Sea.

Brzezinski conflates the interests of the U.S. government and U.S. corporations with those of the international community. "It follows that America's primary interest is to help ensure that no single power comes to control this geopolitical space and that the global community has unhindered financial and economic access to it." Essentially, this is gunboat diplomacy.

Despite being a policy proposal for the new 21st century, *The Grand Chessboard* simply echoed the thoughts of Woodrow Wilson. As president of Princeton University, Wilson wrote about U.S. foreign policy as a symbiotic relationship between the federal government and American businesses.

> Since trade ignores national boundaries and the manufacturer insists on having the world as a market, the flag of his nation must follow him, and the doors of the nations which are closed against him must be battered down. Concessions obtained by financiers must be safeguarded by ministers of

Joseph E. Fallon writes from Rye, New York.

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state, even if the sovereignty of unwilling nations be outraged in the process.

After taking the Oval Office, Wilson's foreign policy toward Asia and Latin America reflected these beliefs. A shared commitment to this feature of Wilsonianism unites Brzezinski and the Bush administration.

The primary objective of *The Grand Chessboard* was to promote the containment of Russia. Implementation began in 1999 when the Clinton administration supported NATO membership for the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland. This was in violation of the 1990 understanding between President George H.W. Bush and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev. In exchange for Soviet backing for the "Two Plus Four Agreement" on German reunification, Washington had promised Moscow that NATO would not be expanded.

Despite seven years of strenuous efforts, the Bush administration's continuing Cold War with Russia is unsustainable. The pursuit of Russian containment has led to a decline in America's military and economic strength. By pushing for an enlargement of NATO, the Bush administration has only succeeded in increasing strains within the organization.

By 2004, the nature of Russian containment could be seen in the policies pursued or supported by the Bush administration. Russia had been denied membership in the WTO and was told she could never be a member of NATO or the European Union. Even the 1974 Cold War Jackson-Vanik trade sanctions imposed by Washington on the Soviet Union remained in force against Russia. While fighting Islamic insurgencies in Afghanistan and Iraq and saber-rattling before the regimes of North Korea and Iran, the Bush administration still energetically lobbied for NATO expansion—its own *Drang nach Osten*. For while Washington would accept neutrality for Ireland, Switzerland, Sweden, and Finland, it would not accept neutrality for former Warsaw Pact countries. Thus, in 2004, seven former communist Eastern European countries were admitted into NATO, including, for the first time, three former Soviet republics: Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

These seven represented what U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld termed a new "center of gravity" in NATO. They were needed in NATO to achieve six policy objectives of the Bush administration. The first was to ensure the continued existence of an organization whose justification had ended with the disbandment of the Warsaw Pact. The second was to preserve U.S. dominance of NATO. The third was to transform NATO from a defensive military alliance into an offensive one. This is an ongoing process, which began 12 days after the admission of the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland in 1999, when NATO launched a war against Yugoslavia over Kosovo. The fourth was to redefine the mission of NATO from one limited to Europe to one with a global mandate. This was achieved at the 2002 Prague Summit, which declared that "NATO must be able to field forces that can move quickly to wherever they are needed." The fifth was to have NATO countries provide bases and troops for current and future U.S. wars. And the sixth was to have allies in NATO willing to use NATO to "contain" Russia. The Bush administration is pursuing this objective by proposing that a missile-defense system (allegedly to protect Europe from Iranian missile attacks) be placed in Poland and the Czech Republic—near Russia, not Iran. As Prof. Keir Lieber noted in *Foreign Affairs* ("The Rise of U.S. Nuclear Primacy," March/April 2006), "the sort of missile defenses that the United States might plausibly deploy would be valuable primarily in an offensive context, not a defensive one—as an adjunct to a U.S. first-strike capability, not as a stand alone shield."

George F. Kennan, U.S. ambassador to Stalin's Soviet Union and father of the containment doctrine, declared that this expansion of NATO into Eastern Europe was "the most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-Cold War era." Yet if NATO membership were limited to "Old Europe"—France, Germany, and the United Kingdom—the Bush administration's goals would be difficult to achieve. In its final months, the administration is actively pursuing membership for two additional former-Soviet republics: Ukraine and Georgia. As a member, Ukraine would pose national-security concerns for Russia. A pro-American government in Kiev would likely be encouraged to expel the Russian Black Sea fleet from Sevastopol in the Crimea, in order to disrupt and diminish the effectiveness of the Russian navy. And all of western Russia, except for its territory with Finland, Belarus, and Moldova, would border a U.S.-dominated and nuclear-armed NATO.

Since 2002, the Bush administration has unilaterally withdrawn from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty and has asserted the right of the U.S. government to launch "preventive" wars, to employ tactical nuclear weapons on the battlefield, to militarize outer space, and to use force to prevent the rise of any rival power. Professor Lieber remarks that "Today, for the first time in almost 50 years, the United States stands on the verge of attaining nuclear primacy. It will probably soon be possible for the United States to destroy the long-range nuclear arsenals of Russia or China with a first strike." The new national-security strategy adopted by the Bush administration constitutes a clear and present danger for both the United States and the rest of the world.

As I write, the 2008 election remains undecided. As president, Sen. John McCain would only intensify the Bush administration's policy. On some issues (such as those involving Russia), he is more of a hawk than Presi-

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dent Bush. He has repeatedly called for Russia's expulsion from the G-8. His neoconservative foreign-policy advisors include William Kristol, the founder and editor of *The Weekly Standard* and son of Irving Kristol, the founder of neoconservatism; Robert Kagan, identified by the *New York Times* as "a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace" and "a leading architect of a muscular and expansive American policy"; Max Boot, whom the *New York Times* called "an influential neoconservative author and policy expert as well as a military historian . . . an Olin senior fellow in national security studies at the Council on Foreign Relations and a contributing editor at *The Weekly Standard* and *The Los Angeles Times*"; John R. Bolton, the former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations; and Randy Scheunemann, founder and president of the Committee for the Liberation of Iraq and a former lobbyist for Georgia's President Saakashvili.

Following the admission of Ukraine and Georgia into NATO, McCain would likely seek the overthrow of President Lukashenko of Belarus in another color-coded "revolution," followed by the admission of Belarus into NATO. From Vadso, Norway, to Tbilisi, Georgia, a new "iron curtain" would then stand between Russia and the West. (Barack Obama's "me too!" reaction to the Russian response to Georgian aggression indicates that a similar scenario might play out in an Obama administration.)

The Bush administration has been attempting to cordon off Russia from the south as well. In his 2002 Report to the President and Congress, Secretary Rumsfeld wrote that the Pentagon was realigning its "defense posture" to gain strategic control of what he described as "a broad arc of instability that stretches from the Middle East to Northeast Asia." This arc corresponds to Russia's entire southern border, stretching from the Black Sea to the Sea of Japan.

In 2001, the Bush administration established military bases, or negotiated the use of airbases, in all five former Soviet Central Asian republics, in the name of the "War on Terror." In Kazakhstan, Washington was granted the use of airbases at Shymkent and Lugovoy. In Kyrgyzstan, it established a military presence at Manas Air Base. In Tajikistan, it established emergency-refueling points for the U.S. military. Turkmenistan, under President Turkmenbashi, unofficially allowed Washington use of her bases to provide "humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan." In Uzbekistan, the Bush administration established the most important U.S. military base in Central Asia ("Stronghold Freedom"), at Karshi-Khanabad. It lost this base in July 2005 when the Uzbek government of President Islam Karimov, believing Washington was conspiring to overthrow it through another color revolution, terminated the October 2001 agreement.

In addition to military bases, the Bush administration has been attempting to buy a pro-American foreign policy from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and, until recently, Uzbekistan by giving these states hundreds of millions of dollars, principally through bilateral treaties and the Central Asian Border Security Initiative. For instance, between October 2001 and 2004, Uzbekistan received approximately $300 million in economic assistance.

Russia's southern border also includes the Caspian Sea. Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, the demarcation of this body of water has been disputed by Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Iran, Russia, and Turkmenistan. From a geostrategic perspective, the Caspian Sea is extremely important, as it possesses vast reserves of oil and natural gas. Existing pipelines transecting the sea bring natural gas from Central Asia to an energy-hungry Europe. Moscow has benefited from its control of most of these pipelines. The income and influence they afford have strengthened Russia's economy and invigorated her foreign policy. In response, the Bush administration has sought to undermine Russia's claim to the Caspian region. Washington has provided training and funding for the navies of Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan in order to "improve security on the Caspian Sea," which, in turn, has established a physical presence for them in the disputed zones, thereby improving their respective claims under international law.

Future attempts to deploy NATO troops to conflicts outside of Europe will likely destabilize Europe, as some member-states refuse to participate, viewing such missions as a threat to their national security. The U.S. government should turn away from its policy of containment and establish normal bilateral relations with Russia.

The Caucasus, including the former Soviet Republic of Georgia, have been a part of Russia for longer than Texas has been part of the United States. There, the Bush administration supported a color revolution that overthrew what it viewed as the pro-Russian government of Eduard Shevardnadze and installed pro-American, U.S.-educated Mikheil Saakashvili. On November 24, 2003, the *Wall Street Journal* credited the success of the "Rose Revolution" to "a raft of non-governmental organizations . . . supported by American and other Western foundations." Among the American foundations were such Cold War agencies as the National Endowment for Democracy and Freedom House.

Despite Georgia's failed invasion of South Ossetia, the U.S. government continues to pursue its containment policy by reaffirming Washington's support for Tbilisi in its dispute with Russia over the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and pressing for Georgia's membership in NATO. Under the guise of the Georgia Train and Equip program and the Georgia Border Security and Law Enforcement program, the Bush administration claimed it was simply helping Georgia's military to fight Chechen rebels hiding in the Pankisi Gorge. As recent events have

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shown, the real reason was to provide President Saakashvili with the military capacity to defeat the pro-Russian forces in the two breakaway regions and reintegrate them into the Georgian state.

Washington has applied its containment policy to Russia's eastern and northern borders as well. In Russia's far east, the U.S. government has a string of military bases extending from Alaska and the Aleutian Islands to Japan and South Korea. Despite official statements by Washington that these bases are needed for the defense of South Korea and Japan from any attack by North Korea, they also confine Russia to the Sea of Okhotsk and the Sea of Japan. Vladivostok, Russia's largest port on the Pacific Ocean, is effectively surrounded by U.S. bases located to its southwest, southeast, and northeast.

Meanwhile Russia's northern border is contained by a series of U.S. bases and facilities that nearly surround the Arctic Circle. They stretch from Alaska (which, now famously, is two miles from Russia at their closest point), through Winnipeg (headquarters of the Canadian NORAD Region) to Greenland. These, in turn, link up with NATO.

An economic dimension has recently been added to this northern containment. With the shrinking of the polar ice cap, arctic oil and gas fields have become exploitable. Under international law, Moscow has laid claim to large sections of the resource-rich Arctic seabed, as they are an extension of Russia's Lomonosov Ridge. Given the enormous profits this region could garner, the Bush administration has dismissed Russia's claim, while simultaneously encouraging rival claims by NATO members Canada, Denmark, and Norway.

Despite seven years of strenuous efforts, the Bush administration's continuing Cold War with Russia is unsustainable. The pursuit of Russian containment has led to a decline in America's military and economic strength. By pushing for an enlargement of NATO, the Bush administration has only succeeded in increasing strains within the organization, undermining its cohesion and effectiveness. New member-states will likely see political fallout as their governments opt to spend money on integrating their militaries into NATO instead of social programs. Political tensions within NATO already exist, between Greece and Turkey, Spain and the United Kingdom, the United Kingdom and Iceland. Washington has added new conflicts to NATO involving the Czech Republic and Germany, Hungary and Slovakia, Hungary and Rumania, Rumania and Bulgaria, and Bulgaria and Greece. Future attempts to deploy NATO troops to conflicts outside of Europe will likely destabilize Europe, as some member-states refuse to participate, viewing such missions as a threat to their national security.

Thus, it is in the interest of all parties for the U.S. government to end the Cold War by turning away from its policy of containment and establishing normal bilateral relations with Russia. ©

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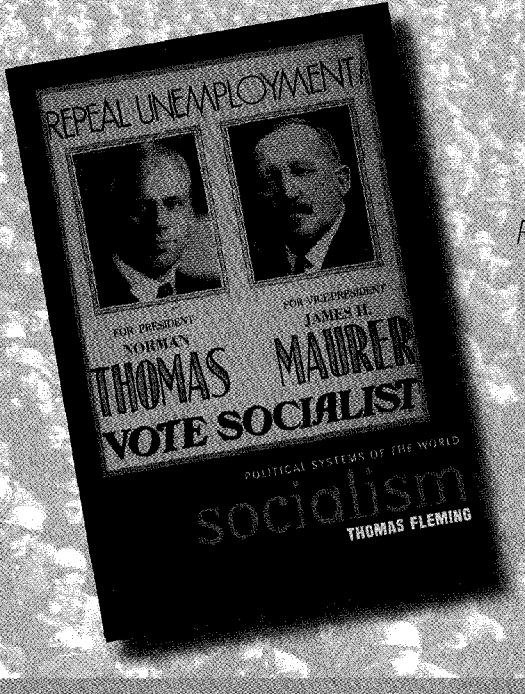

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by Taki Theodoracopulos

The Monkey Chronicles

I want to make something very, very clear. This column's review of the autobiography of Cheeta, Tarzan's chimpanzee, has absolutely nothing to do with the man who just got elected to the White House last month. Cheeta's 336-page opus was published in Britain two months ago by Fourth Estate and has become a runaway best-seller. Is it a spoof? Obviously, but it's a brilliant one, taking us back to the good old days of Hollywood when stars kept their mouths shut about politics, and their noses clean from cocaine—at least in public.

For any of you who have not heard of Cheeta, he is the longest-living chimp, 76 as of this writing, whereas most of his kind live only up to 40 or 45 years in the wild. Which goes to show the Hollywood jungle may not be such a bad place after all. Cheeta ascribes his longevity to his daily injections against diabetes, and the benefits of a civilized society. *Me Cheeta* may well be among the finest Tinseltown memoirs ever written, rivaling those of David Niven and Errol Flynn. He was shipped over from Africa as a baby and hit the big time right away with *Tarzan and His Mate* in 1934. His costars were the great Johnny Weissmuller and the beautiful Maureen O'Sullivan, both of whom received top billing, although it was Cheeta who stole the show.

Once in training by the Sammy Glicks of Hollywood, who knew they had a money-spinner in their pay, the chimp became a star as soon as the first Tarzan movie was released. I remember seeing the film in Greece as a child—one of the few American movies allowed by the Germans to be shown—and the German officers laughing loudly when Cheeta would open his mouth and stick out his tongue and make fun of the strange Anglo-Saxons trying to capture his boss, Tarzan. Cheeta did not pull his punches back then, and does not pull them now, in print. His autobiography sticks very closely to the facts. He did not like Charlie Chaplin and calls him "a world-historically unfunny charlatan," but in Chaplin's case I tend to disagree with the chimp. I was among the last people to photograph Chaplin, for *Paris Match* in 1969, and I found him to be extremely charming and rather conservative in his views of the Cold War. (The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia had him hopping mad.)

Otherwise, Cheeta is right on the money. Rex Harrison was among the most repellent of men, a conceited creep who was rude to underlings and people who couldn't answer back—the great Noel Coward always pretended to kick a tire upon seeing him, as Harrison reminded him of a used-car dealer—and Cheeta lets Harrison have it. The chimp's last movie was with the ghastly Harrison—*Doctor Dolittle*—and Cheeta recounts how he had been deposited by the dastardly Harrison at the top of a monkey-puzzle tree. Harrison had a bet with his wife, Rachel Roberts: "If the monkey makes it down you can sleep with Richard Burton, if he'll have you, and if it doesn't, then I can divorce you." Nice guy, this Harrison. Cheeta did not make it down the tree, much to the distress of animal lovers on the set. The chimp finally falls down, unhurt, and the overpaid creep Harrison loses his bet.

To my surprise, Cheeta is very rude about Esther Williams, the swimming beauty, as well as the fabulous Errol Flynn. The latter I met during my youth, and he was a much misunderstood man. He was extremely well read, and his parents were academics. He treated Hollywood's world with the disdain of an aristocrat toward the great unwashed. Perhaps if Cheeta had made a movie with him and gotten to know him better, he would have changed his mind. Cheeta also disliked Mickey Rooney, which in my mind is like hating apple pie, the corner drugstore, and cheerleaders on a Saturday afternoon. Never mind. At one moment, Cheeta is having dinner with Joan Crawford's poodle Cliquot, a terribly boring evening, and then he is witness to a steamy lesbian scene between Marlene Dietrich and Mercedes de Acosta. "You can well imagine how bored I was watching them, and I scampered off to look for Johnny."

And so it goes. I knew most of the stories, but, after all, I've been around since donkey's years. Cheeta writes well and has strong views on human beings and sex. When I called the publisher and asked for the identity of the ghostwriter, the answer was that Cheeta wrote it himself. I do not doubt it. "How could I not envy humans?" asks the author. "They were so much more interesting than anything other species had come up with." Hear, hear! Still, although I agree with Cheeta that we humans are more interesting than the rest of God's creations, I have to wonder how we have come to this: to have posturing peacocks like Joe Biden spouting gibberish that would have the hook working overtime in a beer hall, or egregious self-publicists like Christopher Hitchens preaching on prime-time TV about the evils of the Catholic Church. Ours is a scene of Hogarthian squalor and retching, and you and I, dear readers, are responsible for it. We have allowed those beyond redemption, the utter scum of this world, the coarse, the greedy, and the avaricious to lead us, and now it's time to pay. Long live Cheeta. ◈

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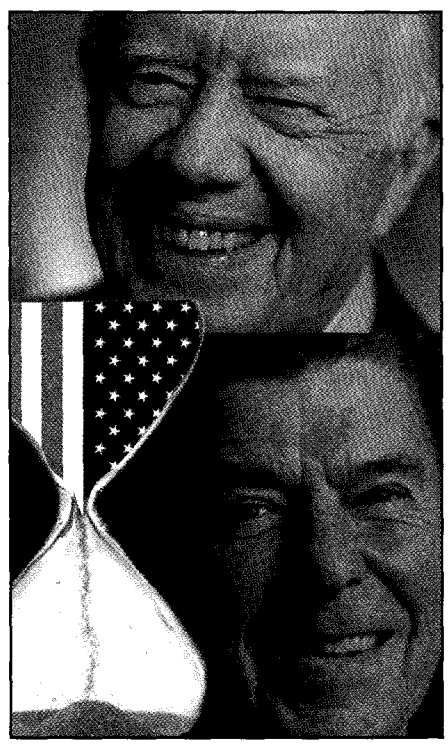
The Fall of the House of Utter

by Clark Stooksbury

"Arrogance and boldness belong to those that are accursed of God."
—Saint Clement of Rome

The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism
by Andrew J. Bacevich
New York: Metropolitan Books; 206 pp., $24.00



Melanie Anderson

After the end of the Cold War, reasonable people might have expected the United States to withdraw from her many foreign commitments and become a normal country again. Yet the opposite has happened. Rather than dissolve, NATO has expanded. Instead of settling back to enjoy a peace dividend, the United States has intervened militarily in the Persian Gulf, the Balkans, and numerous other places. In *The Limits of Power*, Andrew Bacevich investigates why the United States did not return in the 1990's to what President Harding had called "normalcy."

The first section of his book recalls Bill McKibben's *Deep Economy* (2007), a condemnation of American hyperindividualism and rampant consumption as a source of personal dissatisfaction and as a threat to the environment. Bacevich goes a step further than McKibben by tying the American culture of consumption to an expansionist foreign policy.

Clark Stooksbury writes from Knoxville, Tennessee.

> The impulses that have landed us in a war of no exits and no deadlines come from within. Foreign policy has, for decades, provided an outward manifestation of American domestic ambitions, urges, and fears. In our own time, it has increasingly become an expression of domestic dysfunction—an attempt to manage or defer coming to terms with contradictions besetting the American way of life.

Bacevich characterizes the essential threat to the country as the "crisis of profligacy." His point is that the wasteful and energy-intensive American way of life drives and influences our foreign policy.

Bacevich quotes extensively from President Jimmy Carter's "malaise speech" of July 1979. Carter had numerous failings, but he did understand the importance of the energy issue and of American profligacy. The malaise speech, Bacevich notes, violated a cardinal rule in American politics:

> In American political discourse, fundamental threats are by definition external. Nazi Germany, Imperial Japan, or international communism could threaten the United States . . . Yet Carter now dared to suggest that the real danger to American Democracy lay within.

The gist of the speech was that Americans are spiritually unsatisfied by material consumption. Bacevich writes that Carter's "conception of authentic freedom was qualitative: It meant living in accordance with permanent values. At least by implication, it meant settling for less." This message did not catch on. The speech was not welcomed by self-indulgent postwar Americans. No president since that time has made the mistake of telling Americans that they might be better off settling for less. The political beneficiary of Carter's gloomy assessment was his political and (more importantly) temperamental opposite, Ronald Reagan.

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Reagan fares poorly in the estimation of Andrew Bacevich. He describes the 40th president, who set the tone for the last three decades of American history, as "the modern prophet of profligacy, the politician who gave moral sanction to the empire of consumption," and criticizes Reagan for having exercised his "canny knack for telling Americans what most of them wanted to hear," primarily that they "could have more."

Today, Reagan is lionized for having secured victory over the Soviet Union in the Cold War, yet the contest with the Soviets was only one aspect of his foreign policy; another was an interest in the Persian Gulf and in that region's large supply of oil. Bacevich writes that Reagan

> put in motion efforts to secure U.S. domination over the Persian Gulf. A much-hyped but actually receding Soviet threat provided the rationale for the Reagan military buildup of the 1980s.

Yet, he continues, "the splendid army that Reagan helped create found eventual employment . . . in vainly trying to impose an American imperium on the Persian Gulf."

Reagan's record in the Gulf is one of folly and misadventure. The President famously "tilted" toward Iraq during that country's war with Iran, while secretly selling arms to the latter. Bacevich recalls some long-forgotten events in the Gulf during the 1980's, including an act of aggression by Iraqis against Americans in the form of a missile attack on a U.S. frigate, which killed 37 sailors. Reagan, Bacevich notes, "generously accepted Saddam's explanation and blamed Iran for escalating violence." Another event that usually falls down the memory hole was the missile strike by the cruiser U.S.S. *Vincennes* that killed almost 300 Iranians on an Iranian commercial airliner while supposedly defending Kuwaiti oil tankers in the Persian Gulf.

The Reagan administration's focus on the Gulf safeguarded American access to much-needed petroleum supplies, but, as Bacevich notes, President Reagan's

> real achievement in the Persian Gulf was to make a down payment on an enterprise destined to consume tens of thousands of lives, many American, many others not, along with hundreds of billions of dollars—to date at least, the ultimate expression of American profligacy.

Bacevich comes down hard on President Reagan, but he does not excuse the men who followed him. More importantly, he notes the development of the American public's notion of the presidency since the Kennedy years, a process that has caused the chief executive to be regarded today as a "demigod, father figure, and inevitably, the betrayer of inflated hopes." Indeed, the extent to which presidents have become celebrities dominating the public stage is almost as disturbing as the level of power that they have usurped.

Presidents have increased the power of their office largely through the expansion of the national-security state that occurred after World War II. Bacevich credits the rise of the security state with killing off the Old Republic. And it is doubly damning that the security state does not work:

> To substantiate that judgment, one need only recall the events of the present decade, including the failure to anticipate and avert 9/11; the failure to bring to justice its chief architects; the failure to devise a realistic and strategically coherent response to the threat posed by Islamic extremism; and above all the egregious failures associated with the Iraq and Afghan wars.

Bacevich considers three popular explanations for the recent failures of the national-security state, starting with President George W. Bush. The next ring in the concentric circle of blame includes Bush's subordinates, such as Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld. Next there is the "cabal of neoconservatives said to exercise diabolical influence over the president and his inner circle." Finally, Bacevich adds a fourth explanation—that President Bush "has for the most part operated within the framework that has defined basic national security policy for decades."

Although there is a great deal of truth in the last of these causes, it is important not to neglect the first three. Neoconservatives had been demanding an invasion of Iraq for years before September 11. Al Gore, had he been president, might also have invaded Iraq at the urging of *The New Republic* and Vice President Lieberman, but there are many features of the last eight years—the megalomaniacal carrier-landing stunt, the normalization of torture, the naive expectation of a "cakewalk" war followed by a liberators' greeting on the part of the Iraqi people—that seem to be unique to the Bush administration.

Bacevich enumerates the principles of America's national-security ideology that culminate in the belief that, for "the American way of life to endure, freedom must prevail everywhere," which amounts to a moral blank check for U.S. foreign policy. After all, who can be against freedom? President Bush has repeatedly cashed such checks, but he is far from unique among modern American presidents in having done so, and there is little reason to assume that the near future will be any different. Sen. Barack Obama, alas, is no "Come home, America" McGovernite:

> Like Bush—like those who preceded Bush—Obama defined America's purposes in cosmic terms. "The mission of the United States," he proclaimed, "is to provide global leadership grounded in the understanding that the world shares a common security and a common humanity."

The possibility that the United States doesn't have a "mission" to save or police the world has very little sup-

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port among the elites who direct our foreign policy.

The United States also has a dysfunctional national-security apparatus:

> Over the last several decades, presidents have come to view the national security apparatus not as an aid but as an impediment in decision making. More often than not, presidents have come into office wary of any advice that these institutions might offer, suspecting that it is anything but disinterested.

Yet the advice of these sages has often been dubious and has leaned heavily toward fear-mongering. NSC 68, written chiefly by Paul Nitze and published by the National Security Council in 1950, averred that the United States was "in greater jeopardy than ever before in our history" from the Soviet Union, which, Bacevich reminds us, was at that time "a country leveled by World War II and barely in the recovery phase." The NSC document got a boost when North Korea invaded the South. "[N]ot for the last time in recent American history . . . Wise Men impulsively attributed earth-shattering significance to a development of middling importance," Bacevich notes.

> The result was to sweep aside remaining doubts about Nitze's prescription. NSC 68 became dogma. The defense budget more than tripled in size, most of the increased spending used not to fight in Korea but to fund the program of general rearmament that Nitze had proposed. The militarization of U.S. policy began in earnest.

Nitze was to be involved in other alarmist hysteria over the "bomber gap" and "missile gap" in the 1970's when he was a member of the CIA's Team B, which warned of the threat of a Soviet first strike.

Among Nitze's heirs is Paul Wolfowitz, a junior member of the Team B panel who would join with Donald Rumsfeld in the 1990's to warn of the dangers posed by the future Axis of Evil: Iran, Iraq, and North Korea. In Bacevich's estimation,

> the Soviet Union never achieved anything remotely like a preemptive capability. As for the Rumsfeld commission, its conclusions have proven entirely bogus. Yet in each of these cases, as with NSC 68, the hue and cry concocted by Wise Men produced the intended result.

Wolfowitz was Rumsfeld's deputy when the September 11 attacks occurred, giving him and his allies in the Bush administration a tremendous opportunity to put their theories into practice. The results of this execution have spawned a literary genre, and Bacevich doesn't devote a great deal of space to a topic that has been, and will continue to be, examined at length in other works. *The Limits of Power* is more concerned with the ways in which the Bush administration represents a continuation of recent history.

Andrew Bacevich examines the military crisis that has grown out of America's dysfunctional national-security ideology in the context of our moribund political culture. The crisis manifests itself, in part, in a shortage of troops. Bacevich considers the possibility of reinstating the draft, but rejects it as a poor idea as well as politically impossible. Rather than favoring an expanded Army, Bacevich prefers a downsized mission. "America doesn't need a bigger army. It needs a smaller—that is, more modest—foreign policy, one that assigns soldiers missions that are consistent with their capabilities."

The Limits of Power is, at times, an angry polemic. Andrew Bacevich's disgust with America's bankrupt (in every sense) political culture is well justified. That culture has led the country, in his view, to embrace an unsustainable concept of freedom understood as mass consumption built on debt at home and arrogance abroad. ©

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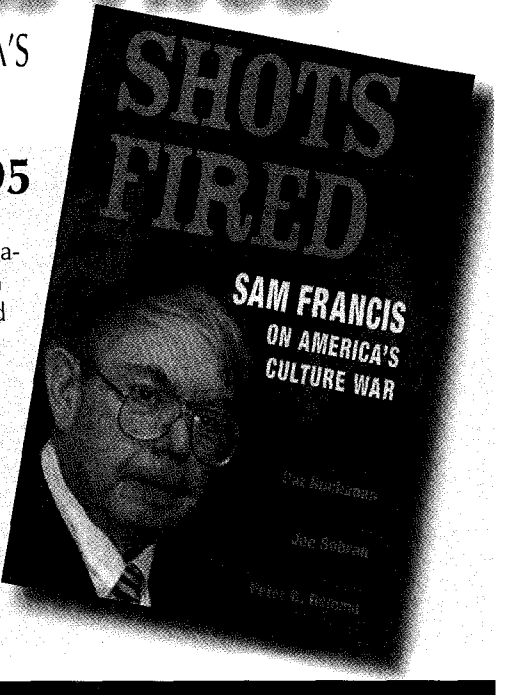
—*Aaron D. Wolf*



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A Republic of Speculators

by H.A. Scott Trask

Bad Money: Reckless Finance, Failed Politics, and the Global Crisis of American Capitalism
by Kevin Phillips
New York: Viking Penguin; 239 pp., $25.95

The long-suffering and largely ignored paleoconservatives might be forgiven for taking some satisfaction in the recent bursting of so many bubbles of avarice and pride, the sudden exposure of so many highly leveraged speculations in stupidity. Let us recount some of the failed millennial assertions by the ruling party: that history has come to an end; that this will be a second American Century; that U.S. military power is omnipotent and redemptive; that nationalism and religion have lost all value in the global marketplace; that nature has been remade to serve our pleasure; that technology has abolished the laws of scarcity; that the business cycle has been broken and stretched into an ascending line to utopia; that we can borrow and spend our way to imperial munificence and exurban bliss.

Hence the shock when, in a little less than a year, Americans have seen the dollar plunge, inflation soar, the housing market collapse, the price of gas explode. With their wages stagnating, their savings near zero, credit cards maxed out, their government in deficit and overextended abroad, Americans are panicking, and the mood is understandable. Public-sector debt (state and federal) stands at $11 trillion. That's less than one third of private-sector debt, which is a staggering $37 trillion, and that does not count unfunded federal liabilities (Social Security, Medicare, pensions). The ratio of credit-market debt to GDP is higher than it was at the height of the Great Depression. In 1929, this ratio was 176 percent. In 1933, after FDR devalued the dollar, it rose to 287 percent. In 2006, the ratio was 335 percent.

And there's no end in sight. The United States now imports 72 percent of her petroleum, and both the federal government and the consumer are dependent on annual infusions of foreign capital (to fund the wars of the former, the credit cards and home mortgages of the latter). The U.S. current-account deficit for 2007 was $857 billion, nearly double what it was in 2001. U.S. manufacturing has fallen to 12 percent of GDP, while financial services have climbed to 21 percent.

Kevin Phillips understands that President Richard M. Nixon staged the necessary first act when he severed the dollar's last link with gold in 1971. But in *Bad Money*, he points to the late 1980's, with its lethal combination of liquidity, deregulation, and financial bailouts, "as the launching pad of a decisive financial sector takeover of the U.S. economy." The clearest evidence was the setting up of the President's Working Group on Financial Markets (the Plunge Protection Team) in 1988. Its members included the chairman of the Federal Reserve and the secretary of the treasury. Their task was to intervene whenever panic gripped the stock, bond, or money markets and to restore stability or (what is the same thing) preserve the value of financial assets. Their techniques included emergency loans (often at below-market interest rates), cash infusions, the lowering of interest rates, pressuring healthy firms or even foreign investors to bail out ailing firms, even buying on the futures market to prop up falling stocks. From 1982 to 2002, the Federal Reserve and the U.S. Treasury, together or separately, intervened 11 times to rescue financial firms from the consequences of their own recklessness and greed. In March the Fed provided $30 billion to facilitate the buyout of the bankrupt investment firm Bear Stearns by the behemoth JP-Morgan Chase. More recently, the government nationalized the federal mortgage lenders Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, and bailed out insurance conglomerate AIG, before authorizing an $850-billion bailout plan that would allow Washington to purchase distressed mortgage-backed securities. For privileged and protected speculators, the profits are private, but the risk is public. Thus, at the very time (the 1980's) when our so-called elite was scorning an industrial policy as a violation of the sacred laws of the all-seeing market, it was quietly adopting a government-sponsored financial policy.

It was the wrong road, but it was only one of many; 1986 was the year of the Reagan immigration amnesty, which falsely promised enhanced enforcement while flashing the green light to the world: There will be no deportations. After a few years of ineffectual hand-wringing about America's "twin deficits" in trade and government spending, the powers that be finally decided after the 1992 election that "deficits don't matter" in the new global economy. The debate about national decline begun by Paul Kennedy in his *Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (1987) was silenced following the triumph of the Persian Gulf War. When the Soviet Union dissolved into its constituent republics, some wondered whether it was time to bring the troops home. Instead, our political class decided that the world had become more dangerous than ever and that the vacuum created by the fall of communism had to be filled with American bases and American pride. It was the "unipolar moment," and we were "the indispensable nation."

Kevin Phillips' last book to influence policy or politics was his first one, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (1969), which taught the Republicans how to win national elections. Since the onset of the Bush regime, he has tried to warn people how the Bushies have been ruining the country. In *The Politics of Rich and Poor* (1990), Phillips noted "the Republican Party's historical role" of "tilt[ing] power, policy, wealth, and income toward the richest portions of the population." He pulled back the curtain of free-market rhetoric to reveal what was really going on: the upward redistribution of wealth by government policy. The techniques are as old as Alexander Hamilton: debt management, currency manipulation, discriminatory taxation. "Laissez-faire is a pretense," he wrote in *Wealth and*

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Poverty: A Political History of the American Rich (2002). "[G]overnment power and preferment have been used by the rich, not shunned."

In *Boiling Point* (1993), he wrote of the betrayal of the American middle class by their political leaders, but also of the dangers of "financialization," "the cumulating influence of finance, government debt, unearned income, rentiers, overseas investment, domestic economic polarization, and social stratification," all signals of a "broad national decline."

In *Arrogant Capital* (1994), he wrote of the financial corruption of the republic. While ordinary Americans were on their own in the "new service economy," big investors, speculators, and money managers who got into trouble could count on being rescued by the government through a policy of "financial mercantilism." The 1989-92 bailout of the bankrupt savings-and-loan industry "was the biggest in America's history," costing the taxpayers $250 billion. It saved the speculative economy.

In *American Theocracy* (2006), Phillips warned of the perils posed by radical religion, oil dependency, and borrowed money and predicted a coming "credit and financial collapse" in which "stock and home prices would . . . sink together." Two policies adopted after the stock-market collapse and the 2000 recession made it inevitable: Bush's tax cuts and spending increases, and Greenspan's 13 successive interest-rate cuts. The effect "was to inflate a new real estate and credit bubble" even bigger than the NASDAQ one. *Bad Money* is all about the arrival of the long-delayed day of reckoning, the beginning of the "deleveraging of a giant two-decade build-up of debt and liquidity."

Phillips wrongly identifies Joseph Schumpeter as a member of the Austrian School of economics, while never mentioning Ludwig von Mises or F.A. Hayek, whose theory of the business cycle has been vindicated yet again. I can understand why the paper pushers and the inflationists ignore these brilliant diagnosticians (because their prescription, re-anchoring the dollar to precious metals, is anathema), but why has Phillips not bothered to get this right?

The magicians at the Fed and the Treasury may have prolonged an inflationary and speculative economy, but they cannot perpetuate it. They cannot conjure wealth out of paper. Nor can an empire continue to police the world on borrowed money, or a people trade "services" and debt for real goods. Real wealth consists in substantial capital (good houses, fertile land, workshops, factories, universities, libraries, works of art). The idea that "financialization" could replace manufacturing as the material foundation of national power and wealth is, as Phillips points out, an error previously made by Spain, Holland, and Britain. In our country this error goes back to Hamilton, who believed that government bonds were capital, when they were only government promises to extract capital from the productive economy. (So it is with finance in general. It is parasitic, not productive.) The fallacy has not been corrected. Instead, it has been extended to the magical market in financial derivatives (mortgage-backed securities, collateralized debt obligations, credit default swaps, *etc.*), which are nothing but glorified IOUs.

Americans are going to learn the hard way that they cannot continue to scorn the law of limitation. There is a limit to how much debt even a great empire can carry, as there is a limit to how much population and diversity a country can have before it collapses from within. Niall Ferguson observed in 2006 that the United States had become an "impire" which "expands by importing, not exporting people," "to the tune of roughly 1.5 million newcomers a year." That cannot continue indefinitely. Nor can the debt and the inflation, the self-indulgence and the boastful pride, or the arrogant denial. If the Panic of 2007-08 changes any of that, it will prove to have been a most fortunate occurrence.

Herbert Arthur Scott Trask is an historian who lives and writes in the Missouri River hill country west of St. Louis.

Man on Holiday

by Fr. Michael P. Orsi

Darwin Day in America: How Our Politics and Culture Have Been Dehumanized in the Name of Science
by John G. West
Wilmington, DE: ISI Books; 375 pp., $28.00

John G. West is a senior fellow at the Discovery Institute, a nonpartisan public-policy think tank that conducts research on technology, science and culture, economics, and foreign affairs. The Institute's Center for Science and Culture is notable for challenging various aspects of evolutionary theory—maintaining, for instance, that evolutionary biology has failed to answer many salient questions.

West's primary thesis in *Darwin Day in America* is that our culture and politics have been dehumanized by a scientific materialism (or reductionism) that sees man merely as the sum of his parts, and that this dogma has taken over the educational system in the United States. He notes that anyone who questions Darwinian evolution—the central idea in this reductionist mind-set—is denounced by academia as a biblical fundamentalist or creationist, and therefore as antiscience.

Two high-profile examples serve to make his point. The first is the 1997 Washington State case in which harassment and punitive measures were applied to Burlington-Edison High School biology teacher Roger De Hart. His crime was that he had asked his students to prepare arguments for either evolution or Intelligent Design. The second is the 2004 Pennsylvania case in which the Dover School Board required that students be informed of Intelligent Design as a possible alternative to Darwinism. In a suit alleging that this constituted the promotion of religion, the judge issued a scathing attack on ID and its proponents. His decision, as demonstrated by West, was copied directly from the handbook of

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the ACLU. It not only misquoted ID theorists but displayed an animus toward religion and toward anyone who challenges evolution.

The title of this book references a movement in some schools and communities to replace Abraham Lincoln's birthday, February 12, with Darwin Day—the goal being "to build a Global Celebration of Science and Humanity that is intended to promote a common bond among all people of the earth." West claims that this "bond" is based on scientific determinism and is being used to promote value-free ethics.

Despite the centrality of Darwinian evolution in modern science, West points out that there is actually scant evidence for one of its fundamental tenets, the gradual evolutionary change in species that Darwin himself postulated. In other words, no "missing link" has ever been found. Instead, science observes species making quantum leaps, with sudden and dramatic changes demonstrated by the fossil record.

Additionally, there is evidence to suggest that living things are more than mere energy and matter. Molecular biologists have discovered that the protein-building needed to produce new organisms requires a fundamental entity: information. In the case of man, West maintains that a need for information is reflected in "human choices and desires [which] are genuine entities that produce real effects." All of this undermines biological determinism, because it is contrary to the Darwinian idea of "natural selection," which is considered a random process.

These facts pose a fundamental challenge to evolution and, according to West, should open science to theories such as Intelligent Design, which asserts that features of the universe and of living things are best explained by an intelligent cause, rather than by an undirected process.

West also explores the much-discussed concept of "social Darwinism," charging that the idea of "the survival of the fittest" inherent in natural selection has promoted a "eugenic culture" in America, stressing a "mechanistic" approach to life and to the modification of human behavior. He points to value-free social-engineering techniques that have had a pervasive influence, affecting social-welfare programs, business and medical ethics, the criminal-justice system, and teaching about human sexuality in our schools. Among the most extreme manifestations of this "mechanistic" approach have been the forced sterilization of individuals deemed mentally deficient in an effort to "cleanse" the gene pool, and the use of pre-frontal lobotomy to regulate the behavior of criminals and the mentally ill, practices that flourished in the early part of the past century.

Disappointingly, West fails to connect social Darwinism to American pragmatism. Here the book is lacking, since it is the combination of materialistic science and value-free philosophy that has provided cultural legitimacy for so many of the most outrageous affronts to human dignity and served to translate them into law. Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes' statement in *Buck* v. *Bull* (1927), in which he condoned forced sterilization, is a prime example: "Three generations of imbeciles are enough."

This link between Darwinism and pragmatism is also indicative of the widespread belief that there is no natural-law standard and that only man-made law is dispositive. Contemporary moral issues such as abortion, embryonic stem-cell research, hybrid embryos, cloning, and sex selection of babies, as well as the redefinition of life and even the determination of when death occurs, all grow out of this deadly combination of science and philosophy.

West is relentless in exposing the devastating effects of Darwinian atheism. He argues that any concept of the inherent dignity of a person based on the notion of man being made in God's image vanished in Darwin's second book, *The Descent of Man* (1871). That work depicted religion as a mere by-product of biology and the "inertia of cultural development," redefining man and the ways in which men should behave. West shows how the present attempt to place all sentient beings on an equal footing is reductionism in the extreme, providing the philosophical basis for a diminution of traditional virtue.

The result is especially obvious in the mechanistic teaching on human sexuality, an approach that reached its fullest flowering in the work of Alfred Kinsey, who continues to influence public-school sex-education programs more than a half-century after his death. The dominant understanding of sex encourages "tolerance" of all forms of sexual activity—premarital sex, homosexuality, bestiality, and more. It deludes society into believing that, according to the laws of science, anything goes, because this is natural for the human animal.

West does an excellent job showing how Darwinian science has cheapened human life and limited man's horizons. Yet his solution—teaching Intelligent Design—is somewhat limited itself, and is certainly one-dimensional. Understanding the grandeur of the human person requires philosophy and theology, which are essential for answering the deeper questions about man's origin, identity, and end.

Pope John Paul II, in his 1996 "Message to the Pontifical Academy of the Sciences on Evolution," stated this need clearly:

> The sciences observe, describe and measure . . . the many manifestations of life, and write them down along the time-line. The moment of passage into the spiritual realm is not something that can be observed in this way . . . But the experience of metaphysical knowledge, of self-consciousness and self-awareness, of moral conscience, of liberty, or of aesthetic and religious experience—these must be analyzed through philosophical reflection, while theology seeks to clarify the ultimate meaning of the Creator's designs.

While West gives the reader cause for concern, he fails to recommend

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any answers to the question of how society can be engaged in a debate beyond Darwinism and ID. And West fails to explore how practices like private schooling, homeschooling, and church attendance may serve as an effective firewall to the Darwinian reductionism that infests our society.

This book demands a sequel.

Fr. Michael P. Orsi is chaplain and Research Fellow in Law and Religion at the Ave Maria Law School in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

The Eternal Dog

by Ronald F. Maxwell

We Give Our Hearts to Dogs to Tear: Intimations of Their Immortality
by Alston Chase
Edison, NJ: Transaction; 235 pp., $34.95

When Tibbie came into my life, I was already past my 40th year. After a few weeks I marveled how I had ever lived without a dog. As a first dog, this 14-pound West Highland terrier would set the standard for those to follow—kindhearted, gentle, loving, spirited, playful, patient, trusting, intelligent, obedient, mischievous, a beauty to watch, and a joy to snuggle with; but also strong willed, determined, and a born ratter. She and her pal Willie, also a Westie and six months her junior, would corner and kill many a field mouse at their various homes in California, Maryland, and Virginia. At nine years of age, she survived a coyote attack, but her life hung in the balance for 48 hours. When she recovered, she was the same old brave and loyal dog, and when she finally succumbed to cancer a week shy of 17, we still wanted to hold on to her. I will never be the same person for having known her and will keep her in my heart to my dying day.

For this reason, reading Alston Chase's new book, *We Give Our Hearts to Dogs to Tear*, was a cathartic experience. Anyone who has shared his life with a dog knows the unique joy and intense grief inextricably bound up in the relationship. We console ourselves that the dogs, whose life spans are so much shorter than ours, at least don't have to endure our loss, the loss of their master, the primary focus of all their devotion, care, and affection.

Chase's book chronicles more than a quarter-century of a family's history with three main characters: the dogs, the humans, and the land. The dogs are mostly Jack Russell terriers, and as we get to know each one, from birth to death, sometimes slowly from disease, sometimes suddenly from a wild predator or a human vehicle, Chase uses their lives to reflect on the two-century history of the Jack Russell terrier in America and the British Isles.

The humans are the author, his wife, Diana, and individuals raising and caring for these dogs widely scattered across time and place. What emerges is a portrait of this particular type of dog, the hunting Jack Russell, and the people devoted to him or her. The land is Montana—in the late 70's, still a wild and rugged place. By the time the book closes in the first decade of the 21st century, the land has undergone much of the massive shrink-wrapping that is suffocating wild places and the quality of life outdoors everywhere. The Jack Russell is not a hothouse flower. He revels in the open space, the wildness, and even the danger. The more we watch him in Chase's narrative, the more we come to see ourselves. For we, human animals, also need these things to thrive.

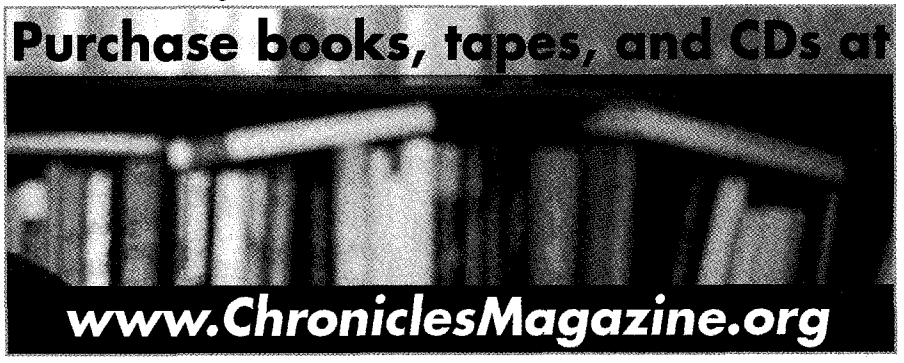
Chase says it best:

> No matter where we live or what we do, love of the land lies in our blood. For twelve millennia, dogs and people lived on the land, working, herding, defending, rescuing. And when, beginning two hundred years ago, people began moving to cities they yearned for the pastoral way of life all the more. They still do. Dogs preserve for us an emotional connection to our bucolic past that remains in memory and imagination. And when they demand we take them for walks, they reawaken this connection. They become guides in a journey to rediscover our own genetic roots.

I shouldn't have been surprised that woven throughout the narrative is an existential contemplation on eternity. Not surprised, because each time a dog leaves, as with the loss of a beloved human, we are forced to confront the unanswerable questions we spend most of our time ignoring. Finally then, this book is a philosophical memoir, a heart-rending meditation on the extraordinary mystery that is the bond between dog and man.

Immediately upon closing the book, I said a prayer for Tibbie, Willie, and Yum-Yum, who had recently been taken by a black bear—then settled down on the faded and much-abused oriental rug with Tobey, Doogie, Penelope, and Patou. They were waiting.

Ronald F. Maxwell is the director of several films, including Gods and Generals *and the forthcoming Western,* Belle Starr.



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by Aaron D. Wolf

Merry Christmas, Pinhead

Twelve long months ago, America was in the throes of Holiday Shopping Season '07. It was a simpler time. The Dow was safely over 10,000, and we were all wondering whether it would be Hillary or Giuliani in the White House come January '09.

I push my cart carrying 250 pounds of chicken feed up to the feedstore counter. The pretty girl behind the register nods and says hello. It's hard for her not to remember the giant white man with a beard and a Stetson who always guides five 50-pound bags through the narrow checkout lane. As she hands me the receipt, I say reflexively, "Merry Christmas."

She looks directly at me, smiling, eyes narrowed, and nods. "*Yes*. Merry *CHRISTMAS*!"

It wasn't a bright, elven "Yes! *Merry Christmas!*" She spoke with a knowing, *in your face, liberal America* air of defiance. And that made me smile.

Then it made me wonder. Heading back to the farm in my pickup truck, I turned down Haggard and relit my pipe when the thought occurred to me: Wonder what she thinks about the Incarnation?

I was in no position to go back to the store and assign a 500-word essay, "What Christmas Means to Me," to the girl in jeans whose name tag I am careful not to stare at, so I was left to my own musings. She's probably no theologian. Not many folks are these days. I'm guessing she couldn't tell me why the words *unconfusedly, immutably, indivisibly*, and *inseparably* were so important at the Council of Chalcedon. Depending on the church she attends, or attended, she may say the words Athanasius whispered to his bishop, Alexander, at Nicea—the words that drew a line in the sand that Arius could not cross: "begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father." She may say them, or might have said them. But does she know what they mean?

You're expecting too much, I reply, puffing. The Baptists you grew up with didn't say the Nicene Creed, but they knew that Jesus is fully God and fully man—and that He was born of a virgin.

So she's a Baptist now?

Maybe—I really don't know. I'm guessing probably not. That *Merry Christmas* seemed more like a countercultural protest statement, the kind that says, yeah, you're one of us, or yeah, I'm one of you.

One of you . . . *what*? Believers in Christ Jesus? One of you who celebrate the Word Become Flesh? One of you who worship a Baby? The One Who made the world in six days, the One Who bore our sins in His Body on the tree, the One Who crushed the serpent's head, the One Whom death and Hell could not hold, the One Who is returning on a white horse, Whose vesture is dipped in blood, Whose name is Faithful and True?

Or perhaps it was *one of you proud white Americans*.

The War Against Christmas is very real, and many brave Christians have sounded the alarm like Paul Revere, before riding out to the front to fight back. But others seem more interested in nativism than in the Nativity. Over there on *that* side are the enemies of America, "Western Civilization," apple pie, baseball, democracy, Judeo-Christianism, heterosexualism, and low taxes. Over here on *my* side, we know that we are the greatest nation on earth, that America is great because America is good, that religion belongs in the public square and Christ belongs in Christmas. We don't say "Ex-muss," or "Ramadan," Frenchie.

FOX News's Bill O'Reilly agrees. In fact, according to himself, he is "fighting for the soul of America." On his website, there are numerous products to purchase, including his book, *Culture Warrior*, in which "He examines why the nation's motto '*E Pluribus Unum*' ('From Many, One') might change to 'What About Me?'" and

> shows how the culture war has played out in such high-profile instances as *The Passion of Christ*, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, the abuse epidemic (child and otherwise), and the embattled place of religion in public life—with special emphasis on the war against Christmas.

Christmas, you see, just like Harriet Miers, has been rejected by the leftist media, because of its "anti-Christian bias." And this is outrageous, because "85 percent of Americans say they're Christians" and "Christmas is a federal holiday, signed into law by [President] U.S. Grant."

If 85 percent of Americans believe that that Baby was God, then Bill is right: The War on Christmas is "insane." Perhaps eight-and-a-half out of ten shoppers really are "absolutely offended" when they hear "Happy Holidays." How dare these retailers deny the great majority of Americans the opportunity to confess Christ because some surrender monkey has the ACLU on the line?

In addition to *Culture Warrior,* defenders of Western civilization can purchase "The mug Bill calls 'The Best Mug in the World!'" "This was a birthday present for my husband," writes Jodi of Rockton, IL, "and he thought it was great. He showed it to my Dad and my Dad was jealous. I guess I know what to get my Dad for Christmas!" Nothing alleviates jealousy *and* says "veiled in flesh, the Godhead see" like a 16-ounce coffee mug that shouts Don't Be a Pinhead. ©

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by Scott P. Richert

Losing Our Minds

Most years, writing a column that is due on October 15 for an issue cover-dated December, which will go to press six days before a general election but appear in subscribers' mailboxes and on newsstands about two weeks after, would be a recipe for frustration.

This year, it strikes me as an opportunity.

I have never had a dog in this presidential election. That has been true for a long time; the first time I voted in a presidential election was in 1988, and that was the last time I voted for a major-party candidate. By the time President George H.W. Bush had proved himself "worse than unimaginative—merely silly, often" (as Russell Kirk wrote in his memoir, *The Sword of Imagination*), I had come to regret my folly.

In 1992, if I could have been bothered to go through the hassle of registering to vote in Washington, D.C. (where I was pursuing my graduate studies), I would have cast my ballot for Ross Perot (though if Perot, the only presidential candidate in recent memory who could make John McCain look stable, had had any chance of winning, I probably would have abstained).

In 1996, 2000, and 2004, I voted for third-party candidates: Ralph Nader in the first and last; Pat Buchanan in between. And (as I write) with 20 days left before November 4, I still have not decided which third-party candidate to waste my vote on. (Since, in his current run, Ralph Nader has explicitly endorsed both abortion and homosexual "marriage," I will not be able to mark the ballot for him even as a protest vote.)

Thus, with each election cycle for the past 20 years, I have come closer, one might say, to practicing the supposedly dispassionate political science that I studied as an undergraduate. And I have come to view the behavior of most voters—at least, most avowedly partisan voters—as something akin to mental illness.

This is not exactly an original thought, though most who have entertained it speak of "cognitive dissonance" or compare voter loyalty to people's irrational (used in a nonpejorative sense) attachment to a sports team, or even to their families.

But as I look at the increasingly irrational (used pejoratively now) behavior of many partisan voters, I think that a more pointed label, such as mental illness (or perhaps schizophrenia or merely insanity), is called for.

It is not simply that, say, McCain voters so easily accept the claim that Barack Obama wanted to abandon U.S. soldiers in Iraq when he voted against continued funding of the war, provided that the bill was not tied to a timeline for withdrawal, yet seem unable to process the fact that John McCain (as Joe Biden rightly pointed out in the vice-presidential debate) also voted against continued funding, when it *was* tied to a timeline.

In other words, the disagreement between the two candidates was over setting a timeline for withdrawal, not over continued funding of the war. Yet many McCain voters seemed unable to see it—just as many Obama voters who oppose the war have taken Obama's vote as evidence that he will end the war *tout de suite* upon taking the presidential oath of office. (And yes, he will do it in French, and correct French too, dammit, because that's just the kind of *cosmopolite homme* he is!)

No, the inability to discern the real issue at stake in such disagreements between the candidates is not the sign of mental illness. It is the willingness—or, perhaps more accurately, the determination or even eagerness—of otherwise decent people to let such disagreements (and mistaken disagreements at that) tear apart families and friends.

Up through my teen years, my father's family (those who still lived in West Michigan) would gather almost every Sunday at my grandparents' house for dinner. Before the mashed potatoes had made a complete circuit of the massive dining-room table, the political arguments would begin. And, especially in an election year, they would become quite heated, to the point where a look of fear or panic might even begin to creep into the eyes of the women and young children.

My grandfather and his second-eldest son were devout Democrats; my father was a Republican; my youngest uncle was a conservative turned increasingly libertarian. (At holidays or during the summer when relatives came to visit from Indiana, other political shades were thrown into the mix, new alliances were formed, and the political tides would turn in different directions.) The debates would rage throughout dinner, pausing only for my grandfather to complain that "that woman" (my grandmother, seated at the other end of the table) had once again given him the only slice of cherry pie with a pit in it.

At some point, long after dinner concluded and the men and boys had retired to the living room to play euchre while the women and girls cleared the table and washed the dishes, the argument would finally draw to a close. Depending on the topic being debated at that point, my grandfather might pull out this splendid *non sequitur* that he wielded as if it were the right bower: "The only Republican I ever voted for was Richard Nixon, and look what they did to him!"

I shudder to think how many years these weekly increases in blood pressure stripped off of the back ends of

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the lives of people I loved. My grandfather, who died in February 1992, might still be alive today had dinner-table conversation never strayed from the weather.

And yet, every week, we assembled at the same table again. The conversation might pick up where it had left off ("Speaking of Richard Nixon . . ."), but at least it continued.

Two decades later, I know of dozens of families where the conversation has stopped. I have had people tell me during this election cycle that they are glad that they have moved away from their families and no longer have to see them, because they cannot put up with the things that their fathers say about Barack Obama, or the e-mails that their sisters-in-law forward them making fun of Sarah Palin.

Maybe, when it all comes to an end, these families will sit down together for Thanksgiving or Christmas dinner, bow their heads in prayer, and recognize, even for just one brief moment, that being a part of a family is far more important than being just one of 120 million votes cast for John McCain or Barack Obama.

Maybe, but I doubt it. I know people who are still not talking because "You Republicans stole the election from Al Gore" or "You Democrats wanted to pull out of Iraq and surrender to the terrorists." The unreality of national politics, including the distortions and outright lies that candidates tell about each other, have somehow become more real to them than their own flesh and blood.

What is grasping at phantasms while rebelling against reality if not mental illness?

As if on cue, I have just received an e-mail from my colleague Chris Check with a link to a FOX News story from October 14 headlined "Father Secretly Names Newborn Sarah McCain Palin." The five short paragraphs read like something out of *The Onion*: Mark Ciptak "said he named his third child after John McCain and Sarah Palin 'to get the word out' about the campaign." That makes perfect sense: After all, how would the Republican presidential ticket receive enough publicity in these final weeks of the campaign unless a father named his daughter after the candidates rather than, say, after his mother or grandmothers?

"'I took one for the cause,' he said." (No, in fact, his newborn daughter did, and she had no choice in the matter.) "'I can't give a lot of financial support for the (McCain/Palin) campaign. I do have a sign up in my yard, but I can do very little.'"

Even more astounding, however, is Mr. Ciptak's revelation that he took this action against the wishes of his wife, who wanted to name the girl Ava Grace. "I don't think she believes me yet . . . It's going to take some more convincing."

FOX News, of course, shows no interest whatsoever in what might happen to the Ciptaks' marriage and their three children if he fails to convince his wife that the deception was worth it. But why should they? Were the Ciptaks to wind up in divorce court, the result might be two households in which FOX News is on the TV 24/7, rather than just one.

Politics today is big business—not just for the politicians, but for the news media. For all the talk about the "need to unite" and "to come together as a nation," politicians and the media profit from division—not simply at the national level every four or two years, but every day, among families and neighborhoods and churches.

At this point, you might expect me to say that it doesn't have to be this way, that a more civilized discourse is possible, that as a nation we can return to the heated debates around my grandparents' dining-room table. But I don't think we can. This destruction of everything that matters in life is the logical end of modern democratic politics, which is built on removing all that stands between the "individual" and the state.

Despite our political differences, my family continued to gather around my grandparents' table because we were a family, and that is what has changed. Modern politics has accelerated the destruction of families, but the destruction of families has also helped make modern politics into a form of mental illness.

One sunny but cool day in early fall, during the first year or two of the George H.W. Bush administration, I drove out to visit my grandparents before heading off to graduate school. As my grandfather and I sat in the front yard, our conversation trailed off. Then, unexpectedly, Grandpa told me that he thought that the President was doing a pretty good job so far.

"That's the problem," I said. "People like you are happy with what he's doing."

I simply meant that I could understand why a lifelong Democrat was more pleased with the Bush administration than a budding paleoconservative was. Young and full of myself, I couldn't hear how those words must have sounded to his ears. He simply looked at me, a small, sad smile on his face, and didn't say a word.

Looking back, I don't know whether he even believed what he had said about President Bush; but I realize now that it was something that he thought I would like to hear. His silence afterward, in such marked contrast to years of heated debates, was his way of letting me know that some things are more important than politics.

I wish I had learned that lesson a little earlier. Between that day, when I suffered my bout of temporary insanity, and my grandfather's death not all that long after, I don't remember discussing politics with him ever again.

In *Confessions of an Original Sinner*, John Lukacs writes that, in the 1950's, his diocesan newspaper regularly reminded readers that "The family that prays together stays together." But, he asks, "isn't the converse of that even more true?"

Now, when one of my friends or relatives starts rattling off the latest FOX News talking point, I find myself keeping quiet, a small (but not sad) smile on my face. McCain, Obama, Biden, Palin, Democrats, Republicans—none of it is more important than the years I spent around my grandparents' table, or the time my children will spend around theirs. A big bowl of mashed potatoes does wonders to ward off mental illness. ◁

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Letter From England

by Thomas McMahon

Spy Kids and Labour Snoops

In Great Britain as in the United States, terrorism has provided the perfect pretext for assaulting liberties enjoyed for centuries. Torture, detention without charge, wiretapping, international databases of citizens' private information—all have been enthusiastically pursued in the United Kingdom as in the United States. Yet even as the bloated Labour government has begun to flounder about on the shore, to twitch with ever-decreasing vigor, to start rotting in its own blubber and methane, there have been no signs at all that it has any sense of regret.

George W. Bush may be widely derided, and his approval ratings of under 30 percent may be considered dire, but even he cannot match the utter awfulness of the 16-percent approval rating Prime Minister Gordon Brown hit in June. Brown is roundly disliked; he has acquired the nicknames "Jonah Brown," "the snot-gobbler," and the "Prime Mentalist," among others too cruel to print. Disenchanted Labour types have been hoping for the emergence of a leader for their merry band of rebels intent on toppling Brown and saving their party from impending electoral disaster. However, no one seemed brave enough to put his head above the parapet—best to let Brown suffer the opprobrium of leading Labour to disaster.

Then, from the wilderness, there emerged a voice of authority. Charles Clarke is a former education minister, a former party chairman, and a former home secretary, this last position granting him power over all law-enforcement issues in the realm. He launched a personal and political attack on the prime minister, warning of the danger the party was in unless Gordon Brown changed his ways. All of a sudden Clarke was fêted as the conscience of the party. But while some may feel inclined to compare Gordon Brown to King John, Charles Clarke is no Robin Hood. In fact, although enough time has passed for memories to fade, Clarke was intimately involved in much of the authoritarian nastiness that has brought New Labour into such contempt.

The totalitarian instincts of the man and his party can best be seen in their policy of internet surveillance. In 2005, Clarke was sent to Brussels to make the case for legislation requiring each member-state to keep a centralized database of all e-mails sent, all phone calls made, and even all web pages visited by each and every one of us. The big-boned, fat-mandibled Clarke reportedly "threatened" the E.U. ministers, having been sent to "bang the table." The data-retention laws he was charged with pushing through were marketed as a response to the threat of terrorism. Clarke used the shock and sympathy felt by Europeans after the 2005 bombings in London, which had raised memories of the September 11 attacks, to get agreement from the Brussels commissars.

However, New Labour had shown a desire to introduce similar legislation as long ago as 2000. Clarke was in a junior position at the Home Office at the time, and he was tasked with editorializing in defense of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) to respond to the flood of complaints from individuals and civil-liberty advocates.

Originally, RIPA allowed law-enforcement and security agencies to demand access to any internet user's data—records of the e-mails he had sent and the websites he had visited. It also allowed the government to force any internet service provider to record such data. "Not all Internet Service Providers (ISPs) in the UK will be asked to provide an intercept capability," Clarke wrote to the *Guardian* (June 15, 2000). You don't have to be George Orwell to guess how the government interpreted that policy.

Despite Clarke's subsequent excuses, from the very beginning investigating terrorism was only one of the reasons our data could be recorded; serious criminal acts, public order, and safety were also covered. Later amendments to RIPA extended the right to access the data to any government department and increased the number of suspected offenses that could justify such intrusion. Today 792 organizations can access information under the scheme, including 474 local councils; 19,000 applications to use the data were made by law-enforcement and security agencies last year, while 12,494 were made by other councils and departments.

Thanks to RIPA, eight-year-olds are being recruited by local councils to spy on us for money. Children have been encouraged to report adults for littering, not filling their garbage bins properly, and other such crimes against the people. Some have been given secret codes to identify themselves when they report on adults. The government's justification for such scandalous intrusions can be found in Clarke's declaration to the E.U. parliament in 2005 that legislation was needed to "redress the balance between privacy and security." That is why councils are now spying on those suspected of lying about where they live to get a better school placement for their child, those suspected of fly-tipping, and those suspected of not cleaning up Fido's doodle.

In the Queen's Speech this year, the government will unveil its Data Communications Bill, which will finally put the legislation Clarke pushed in Brussels on the books. All ISPs will be forced to hand over their records to the government for its massive centralized database. The fact that it was our own government that strong-armed the European Union into passing this legislation has been given scant attention. Brussels can be useful for politicians with unpopular legislation; Charles Clarke's name has rarely been associated with the bill

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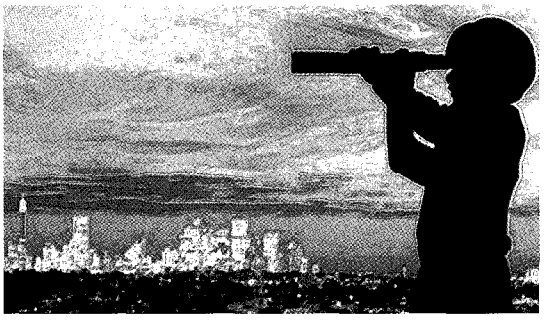
that is now causing such a fuss.

Clarke has a record of being involved in police-state legislation. Accusing his opponents of unfairness when they were winning (a tactic common to bullies), Clarke weighed in on critics of the government's ID-card policy—a scheme to include the biometric information of everyone in the country in yet another giant database. When, in 2004, the London School of Economics declared that a study they had conducted showed that the cards would cost each person £300, Clarke accused them, *à la* Mugabe, of pursuing a media vendetta against the government.

Clarke was removed from office on May 4, 2006, shortly after the revelations of April 26 that over a thousand foreign criminals had been released back into the United Kingdom without being considered for deportation. For some observers, this was a satisfying end to his career in the Home Office: He had become secretary just as the government was taking fire for detaining foreign terror suspects for up to three years without trial. The courts rejected this provision of the Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act of 2001, so Clarke's Home Office introduced "control orders." These instruments were intended to be implemented by the secretary of state himself, rather than the courts, and to give him the power to impose house arrest on the grounds of suspicion alone. *Habeas corpus* was an irritating anachronism to the "modernizing" Clarke and his master, Blair.

Again, it was Clarke who was home secretary when the Terrorism Act of 2006 was drawn up, which included an amendment that would allow the detention without charge of suspects in terror-related cases for up to 90 days. The amendment was defeated, but it was deemed permissible under U.K. law to hold a suspect for 28 days before charging him. The attempt to increase this period to 42 days constituted one of the most disastrous events of this year for Gordon Brown. He was forced to rely on the nine MPs of the Democratic Unionist Party from Northern Ireland to get his legislation



through the House of Commons, amid allegations and accusations that funding was being directed to their province as a *quid pro quo*.

Labour shows no signs of changing its ways. That a man with such a record as Clarke's should be seriously proposed as the future of the party should fill anyone who values the private life of the individual and the basic principles of law with dread. They can console themselves with a glance at the polls, which suggest the party may go down to a defeat of humiliating proportions.

Thomas McMahon spent the last year in St. Petersburg teaching English.

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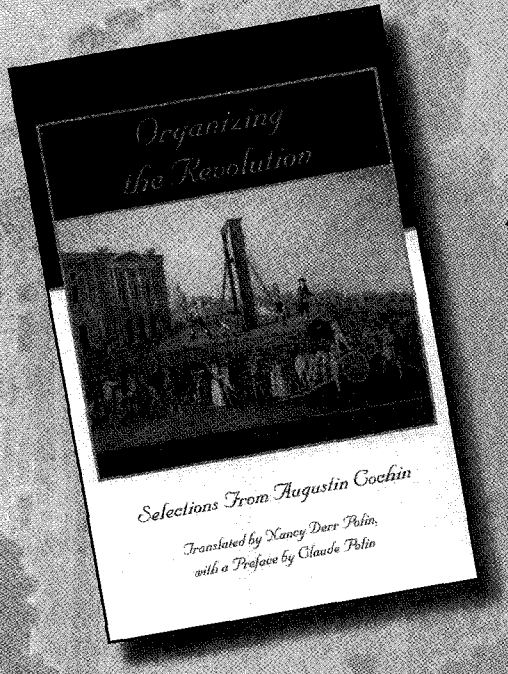
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Selections From Augustin Cochin

translated by Nancy Derr Polin

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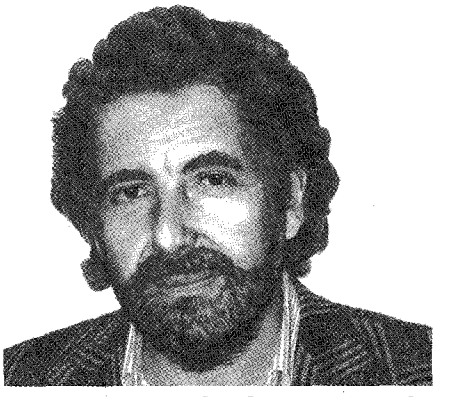
by Andrei Navrozov

In Praise of Having Not



A splendid *Traviata* at Palermo's Teatro Massimo the other night—with its colorful gambling scene at the close of the Second Act, when a jealous Alfredo wins an armful of banknotes only to throw them in Violetta's face—made me think of nothing. Nothing as an end in itself, nothing as the animating spirit of all sublunar existence—nothing, if you like, as a way of life.

I neither speak nor think as a nihilist, and ever since I resigned from the world to become a writer the most disinterested tag to characterize me would be a sybarite fallen on hard times. Unlike Violetta, I am not troubled by conspicuous consumption. Yet one cannot help seeing things, at least when they are something other than glaringly obvious; whoever has glimpsed the irrationality of love can scarcely go on pretending that the world is flat; whilst memories of past dissolution make for an effective eyewash. Thus one perceives, for instance, that poverty is a kind of wealth, a fabulous hereditament of the indigent.

Language itself seems to militate against such a proposition. We call objects of love dear precisely to spare ourselves the trouble of drawing the line between the metaphysical and the physical, between the heart's desire and the frightful expense. Yet the writer bets against language, dissociating its received ideas like most other generalities that come his way, such as the view that the house always wins. He plays with words as though they were chips, and then it occurs to him that wealth may be construed as a liberating absence, not merely of money, but of beauty, of talent, of intelligence, of wit—in short, of just about every vaunted trait whose presence comes to dominate and enslave its vain possessors. For only a man without qualities is truly open to chance; he alone is absolutely free to make his fortune; his way in the world is not the world's way of getting from A to B. Thus, while seeking indeterminacy, he arrives at a philosophy.

The soprano in the part of Violetta had a marvelously rich voice, and no sooner did she exclaim "*Follie*!" than I reflected upon her glittering misfortune. Folly indeed, for had she not been cursed with that endowment, she might have been free to lead an indeterminate existence; free to marry the Italian boy next door, to look at the stars at dusk, to eat lasagna on Sundays—in short, free to find what happiness may now be destined to be denied her. As it is, "our lives are no longer our own," as the original Traviata by Dumas *fils* laments, in *La Dame aux Camélias*. "We aren't human beings, but things."

Like money and rank, beauty and grace are a treacherous grease, which, instead of lubricating the axle of life's locomotive, oils its wheels, whereas the want of such widely envied hereditaments is the grit on which chance relies to ensure traction. Thus Lord Byron, blessed with the impediment of a club foot, famously lacked the grace necessary for dancing. This handicap determined his whole attitude to English society, and it is quite certain that, had the poet been more agile, the stroke of luck that had raised him to wealth and peerage would not have brought Don Juan to life, to say nothing of independence to Greece or the Byronic to temperament. Society, whose approbation he would have won in place of immortality, would have come to possess him just as fatally as it possessed Dumas *fils* and the cocottes of the Parisian demimonde whom the incorrigible socialite regarded with understandable sympathy.

Stalin and Satan, Napoleon and Faust, Hitler and Humpty Dumpty, all sought to use whatever material was at their disposal to construct, to achieve, and to cause to endure. How swiftly did God's agent, fate, wreak havoc on their ant-heap Babels! What, then, of the lesser actors, who, with the determination the world sanctions and the capability it applauds, pursue ordinary, formulaic aims, such as making a pile of money or dating a *Playboy* centerfold? Alas, chance is the scourge of calculation. Determination may determine many an outcome, but *joie de vivre* is not among them.

"I dwell in possibility," said Emily Dickinson. Ambiguity, potentiality, randomness are miserably undervalued in Western culture. Like it or not, both Faust and Hitler are part of this tradition. The mysterious and the miraculous, fragrances of the Orient whose occult exhalations once refreshed a West parched with rationality, are taboo among those who would make ingenuity or industry, to say nothing of the golden calf, an object of fervent worship. It is a barbarously determinist age we live in, characterized by what Renan called the mass mania for certainty.

"The philosopher's phrase, 'I live out of curiosity,' is applicable to all our lives," wrote Remy de Gourmont in his *Epilogues*. "Certainty is a state of annihilation." Like the opera heroine in a richly gilded moment of adulation, we must seek to deviate from the straight path now before us.

We must do less and dream more; we must stop trying to achieve, remarking instead on the enchantments of fatalism, of indolence, of ineptitude, if necessary even of indigence. We must gamble like men used to gamble in the good old days, with eyes closed for stakes to make women faint, and who knows? If we lose enough, those days may return. Quality, rather than qualities, will once more be the measure of character, and life will again be lived for life's sake. ◁

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by Srdja Trifkovic

A New Grand Strategy

Strategy is the art of winning wars, and grand strategy is the philosophy of maintaining an acceptable peace. America is good at the former and often confused on the latter. Making the world safe for democracy (Wilson 1917) or fighting freedom's fight ordained by history (Bush 2002) may be dismissed as tasteless yet harmless rhetoric as long as there is a viable realist design in the background. No such design exists, however: Exceptionalist hubris has been internalized at both ends of the duopoly.

The new team in the White House is unlikely to grasp that a problem exists, let alone to act to rectify it. Fools learn by experience, while wise men profit from others' experience. Nonetheless, what America needs is a new grand strategy. Limited in objectives and indirect in approach, it should seek security and freedom for the United States without threatening the security and freedom of others.

The United States should withdraw her troops from Europe and the Far East within three to five years. Upward of 150,000 American soldiers who are still based in Germany, South Korea, and Japan are not needed, and their continued presence is a hindrance to greater stability in both regions. The threat to Europe's security does not come from Russia or from a fresh bout of instability in the Balkans. The real threat to Europe's security and to her survival comes from Islam, from the deluge of Third World immigrants, and from collapsing birthrates. All three are caused entirely by the moral decrepitude and cultural degeneracy of "Old Europe," not by any shortage of soldiers and weaponry. The continued presence of a U.S. contingent of any size can do nothing to alleviate these problems, because they are largely spiritual.

If a speedy withdrawal of U.S. forces from Europe facilitates the emergence of an effective European defense force (long advocated by France), and if it causes the weakening and eventual demise of NATO, both Europe and America will be better off. Instead of declaring victory and disbanding the alliance in the early 1990's, the Clinton administration successfully redesigned it as a mechanism for open-ended out-of-area interventions at a time when every rationale for its existence had disappeared. Following the air war against Serbia almost a decade ago, NATO's area of operations became unlimited, and its "mandate" entirely self-generated.

In terms of a realist grand strategy, NATO is positively detrimental to U.S. security because it forces the United States to assume at least nominal responsibility for open-ended maintenance of a host of disputed frontiers that were drawn often arbitrarily by communists, Versailles diplomats, and assorted local tyrants—and which bear little relation to ethnicity, geography, or history. America should not underwrite the freezing in time of a post-Soviet outcome in the Crimea or Abkhazia that is neither stable nor necessarily "just" or "democratic." With an ever-expanding NATO, eventual adjustments will be more potentially violent for the countries concerned and more risky for the United States, which does not and should not have a vested interest in preserving an indefinite *status quo* in the region.

In the Middle East, a realist strategy would give up on trying to make the region "as it should be" rather than dealing with it as it is. Iraq, in particular, forces us to accept the anarchic nature of the world. She is not ripe for any democratic transition, she can be managed as long as her realities are accepted, and she needs to be left to her own devices. Her Islamic cultural and spiritual heritage precludes her adoption of a political system based on the notion of popular sovereignty.

A realist global strategy demands safeguarding our primary interests in the Middle East, which means preserving our continued access to oil resources, preventing regional actors from acquiring weapons of mass destruction, and countering the terrorist threat that emanates from the region. Ameliorating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a secondary interest. As for opening the region to trade, encouraging more pluralist forms of governance, promoting the rule of law, *etc.*—these may be worthy objectives, but they are none of our concern.

The development of a coherent anti-jihadist strategy in Washington should go hand in hand with demystifying the relationship between the United States and Israel, which should be redefined in terms of mutual interests. Our interest demands the destruction of global *jihad* in all its forms and the continued existence of the state of Israel, but both of these imperatives are based on geopolitical rather than emotional, moral, or scriptural grounds.

In the Far East, the threat to South Korea's and Japan's security is potentially more real, but it can and should be handled by those two very capable and affluent nations. A continued U.S. defense shield over them is unjustified. The dangers of our continued military presence vastly exceed any possible benefits. Japan and South Korea should finally become mature, self-reliant powers. For decades, they chose to focus on economic development at the expense of military strength, secure in the protection provided by the United States. Only by removing her tripwire can Ameri-

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ca finally force them to upgrade their militaries and to assume the full economic and political burden of their own defense. A policy of disengagement may include a green light to both to develop limited nuclear capabilities as a deterrent to North Korea's and China's arsenals.

The challenge that the rise of China presents to the United States is more pressing than any other global issue except for the ever-present threat of *jihad*. Beijing is rapidly becoming a regional power of the first order, the Asian superpower that will need to be contained or appeased. Presently, the bone of contention is the status of Taiwan. Many Taiwanese would prefer to sever all links with the mainland so that Taiwan can become an independent state. Beijing says that it will not allow that to happen. To condone Taiwan's separation would be tantamount to accepting the status of a second-class power, with serious implications for the future status of Tibet and for the restive Muslim-populated Sinkiang-Uighur province in the far west of the country.

China is an ancient power, coldly hostile to outsiders, steeped in *Realpolitik*, and indifferent to the notion that diplomacy is or should be guided by any motive other than self-interest. Her neighbors will be hard pressed to negotiate the terms and conditions of an acceptable relationship with Beijing that fall short of China's outright hegemony. To keep her ambitions in check, it is necessary to halt further American investment in the Chinese economy, to reverse the outsourcing that has thus far obtained, and to erect trade barriers against the continuing deluge of Chinese-made products in American stores. It is also necessary to provide Taiwan—in addition to Japan and South Korea—with top-notch defensive arsenals, including nuclear weapons.

The alternative is to accept, with the best possible grace, the rise of China as a first-order power. A reigning power is naturally disinclined to look on benignly as another rises, but the fact remains that a conflict between America and China is not inevitable. The relationship will need to be managed skillfully—with more reciprocity in the field of trade and exchange rates—but its essential ingredient will be our acceptance of Taiwan as part of China. Taiwan will eventually be reintegrated (preferably with all kinds of safeguards and special-status provisions), and it is in the American interest to facilitate peaceful reunification.

The geopolitical equation of containing and confronting China in northeastern Asia and *jihad* everywhere else would also demand better relations with India and Russia. India is China's sole natural rival in Asia and a neglected ally in the "War on Terror," but no strategic relationship can be effected so long as Pakistan continues to be perceived in Washington—mistakenly—as an essential regional ally. Islamabad is guilty of nuclear proliferation, its military establishment is hedging its bets between Washington and Muslim extremists, and its entire ethos remains steeped in the ideology of *jihad*.

Improving our relations with Russia, by accepting the legitimacy of her strategic interests in the former Soviet Union, is more pressing. It is critically important for us to prevent the emergence of an alliance between other powers that would be directed against our interests. The ongoing improvement in Russo-Chinese relations does not have the character of a formal alliance as yet, but it may lay the groundwork for one, so long as the Bush Doctrine remains in force.

Most of our disputes with Russia over the past two decades, including the crisis in Georgia last August, tensions over the missile-defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic and over pipelines bypassing Russia, constant demands for NATO expansion, designs in Central Asia, and support for Kosovo's independence have resulted from our refusal to accept the validity of any Russian claims and the legitimacy of any Russian interests. The Clinton and Bush administrations have treated Russia as a third-rate power with limited sovereignty even within her post-Soviet borders. But in seeking to reduce Russia to a land-locked Muscovy and to subvert her internally, Washington is acting to its own detriment. This is the only crusade that the Muslims can support with glee.

The rest of the world, in a new grand strategy, should be left to its own devices. In Latin America benign neglect invariably produces better results than "engagement." As for Africa, the entire continent is irrelevant to our geostrategic, economic, or any other rationally definable interest. Both regions are neither assets nor threats, provided that the tens of millions of would-be migrants to the Western world are held in check.

African political instability is endemic, and even supposed success stories such as Kenya are constantly in danger of descending into anarchy. The continent contributes next to nothing to global science and technology. Its resources are theoretically considerable but often impossible to develop under the prevailing social, political, and legal conditions. Its story is melancholy, but there is little Washington can do, or should do, beyond wishing Africans luck. They will need a lot of it in the decades to come.

A new grand strategy demands disengagement abroad and closing the migratory floodgates at home. For this to happen, it is necessary to break the power of the neoliberal-neoconservative regime in Washington. We cannot predict when or how this will happen, but happen it will. A polity based on an evil lie may last years (the Third Reich), or decades (the Soviet Union), or even centuries (the Ottoman Empire), but it can never smother the seeds of its own destruction.

The notion of America as a real, completed nation, a state with definable national interests that ought to be the foundation of its diplomacy, is as valid today as it was at the time of George Washington's famous warning. Exceptionalist claims and millenarian utopias are as contrary to this country's traditions and true interests today as they were in 1861, 1917, or 1941. It is unfortunate that this truth will be rediscovered only after a lot more blood and treasure is wasted in pursuit of unlimited, unattainable objectives. ◁

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THE FAMILY

Europe's Self-*Jihad*

by Roberto de Mattei

The Report on the Evolution of the Family in Europe 2008, published by the Institute for Family Policies in Madrid, suggests that the family is being closed down and sold off at bargain-basement prices. In Europe there is an abortion every 27 seconds and a divorce every 30. There are nearly one million fewer births today than in 1989. Abortion is the principal cause of death in Europe.

The percentage of young people in Europe is falling massively. There were 94 million people under the age of 14 in 1980, but only 74 million in 2007—a net loss of 20 million young people. By contrast, the number of people over the age of 65 was 57 million in 1980; it reached 80 million in 2007. The inverted demographic pyramid means that the young are being increasingly burdened by the need to maintain the old. Europe seems destined to transform itself into a huge retirement home.

A strong policy to encourage people to have children would be one way to confront the demographic collapse. But this would mean returning to traditional morality and abandoning the antinatalist and Malthusian policies of the last 30 years. Another way—the path chosen by the European Union and by the majority of its member-states—is to encourage immigration. Europe is on its way to becoming a hybrid and multicultural society.

Today, young Europeans are immersed in that "liquid modernity" of which sociologist Zygmunt Baumann has written, which dissolves all truth and all certainty. They live in broken families incapable of transmitting traditional Christian values. The transmission of values takes place over a long period of time, from one generation to the next. Grandparents play a fundamental role; they stand for experience and conservation. Paradoxically, our society is characterized by an increase in the number of old people and a decrease of their role in it. Young people today know nothing of the past or the values of the past. They live in an ephemeral present, completely immersed in today's liquid society. They are unable to receive or to transmit, since their own moorings have been cut loose from tradition. They live in what Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (now Pope Benedict XVI) and Marcello Pera (then president of the Italian Senate) termed, in the title of their 2004 book, a society *Without Roots*.

The second- and third-generation immigrants of non-European origin who live on the outskirts of Europe's large cities and in urban ghettos are also rootless. Though they have been transplanted into European soil, they do not integrate into Western society. Instead, they burn with hatred and frustration against it. The *casseurs*, as the French call them, are a radical expression of this violence and nihilism.

There is, however, a fundamental difference between deracinated people of European origin and those of non-European origin. While deracinated Europeans are deaf to the call of their Christian heritage, immigrants remain sensitive to the call of the religion of their fathers. This is the fruit of multiculturalism in Europe, which creates a strong connection between ethnicity and cultural identity, leading to the proliferation of ethno-cultural "ghettos." Muslim political scientist Bassam Tibi calls them "parallel societies."

Multiculturalism is a form of racism because it insists that there is a correspondence between ethnicity and culture, an indivisible ethno-cultural identity. If a multiethnic society is transformed into a multicultural society, if ethnicity becomes culture, then ethnicity will become the dominant factor, and conflict between ethnic groups will ensue. By contrast, if a multiethnic society is monocultural, the common bond of shared values will reduce the likelihood of clashes.

The creation of these conflict-prone parallel societies is encouraged by the fact that, in Islam, identity is not personal but collective. The call of the *ummah*, the Islamic religious community, has a tight grip on the fragile psychology of deracinated people. According to a poll conducted by the Pew Research Center, today's European immigrants are more preoccupied with their work and their families than with religion, but they all consider themselves Muslims first, and Belgians, Germans, or Frenchmen second.

Even if they are not practicing Muslims, second- and third-generation immigrants represent an important power base for the advancement of Islamic interests in Europe. In Islamic doctrine, *jihad* and *egira* are complementary concepts, as Bassam Tibi explains. *Egira* means migration, and it includes the duty to propagate Islam. The doctrine of *egira* implies the expansion into Europe of the Dar al-Islam, and it coincides with what Bat Ye'or calls "soft *jihad*." And soft *jihad* is no less dangerous than militant, insurgent *jihad*.

We might make a distinction between a Gramscian Islam and a Leninist Islam. In Leninist Islam, Muslims seek to conquer Europe through war and terrorism. In Gramscian Islam, "moderate" Muslims attempt the same by means of demography, the Islamicization of the public sphere, and the introduction of *sharia* into Western institutions. Leninist Islam is the Islam of Osama bin Laden, while Gramscian Islam is well represented by the Muslim Brotherhood and such figures as Tariq Ramadan.

The religious doctrine of *egira* and the ethnicization of Islam are an explosive mixture in the hands of deracinated second- and third-generation immigrants. Violent clashes and perhaps even war in Europe now

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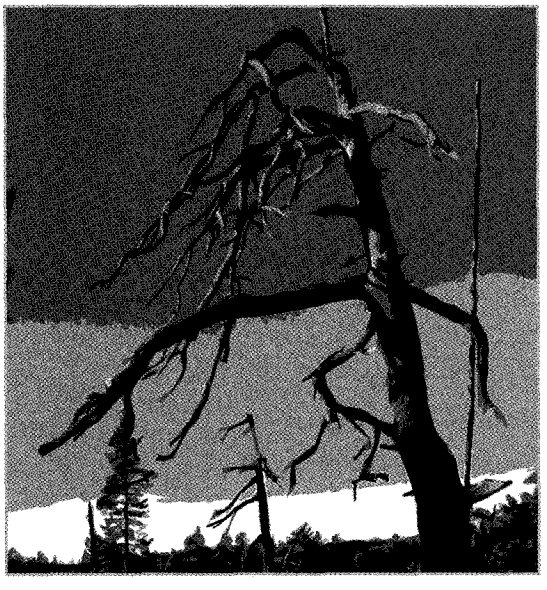
seem inevitable. The revolt of the French *banlieues* has given us a taste of what may be in store.

Europe must return to its identity and roots. The greatest enemy we face is not Islam but relativism, which opens the door for Islam. Relativism is not so much an ideology as a habit, a mentality, a practical fact. It is a part of daily life; it is widely disseminated; it is in the very air we breathe; it has been absorbed into our mores. This relativism does not spread into the atmosphere by natural means; it does not flow like a river from a natural spring. It is disseminated from central ideological laboratories, such as the European institutions, and in its militant form it is often anti-Christian.

If our response is to be successful, it must come from a Christianity that is just as complete and as militant, and just as much a part of our daily life, as the relativism that threatens us. We must reaffirm the value of the natural law, the unique and shared nature of all human beings. And we must redouble our efforts to preserve the family, private property, the state, and the Church—particularly the Catholic Faith, precisely because its message of salvation has both a spiritual and a visible and institutional dimension. That is why the role played today by Pope Benedict XVI is so precious.

Roberto de Mattei is the author of Holy War, Just War.



Homeschooling as Mental Illness

by Beverly K. Eakman

Last March delivered a double whammy to the American people. A few pundits expressed dismay; some parents shook their heads sadly. Then people moved on.

On March 10, California's 2nd Appellate Court virtually banned homeschooling. Then on March 11, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene of the Centers for Disease Control announced epidemic levels of sexually transmitted diseases among teenage girls (one in four). Both were lost among headlines about mortgages and money, murder and mayhem, sex scandals of the rich and powerful.

With the economy already taking a beating and the fifth anniversary of the Iraq war then at hand, presidential candidates on the stump stuck to monetary issues and troop withdrawals. They declined to weigh in on the attempt by an out-of-control judiciary to deprive parents of their rights and children of a solid education.

California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger expressed indignation over the homeschooling crackdown. "This outrageous ruling must be overturned," he demanded, "and if the courts won't protect parents' rights, then, as elected officials, we will. Parents should not be penalized for acting in the best interests of their children." The Governator apparently is not aware that the Nanny State has been encroaching on parents' rights for some 40 years, or that the educational bureaucracy has been moving leftward, regardless of party affiliation.

Incursions into sacrosanct areas of the family have been incremental and subtle—a bureaucratic regulation here, a new policy there, a government-backed "incentive" somewhere else. It isn't until you rewind a couple of decades that it becomes apparent how much self-determination has been squeezed out of the republic.

That the blatant attack against homeschoolers was not based on academic concerns should have come as no surprise to anyone following education issues. In America's public schools the emphasis has not been on the transmission of substantive knowledge for a long time. Instead, the focus has been on the so-called socialization of children—although civility and good manners are neither taught nor expected. Socialization boils down to "mental health."

Justice H. Walter Croskey, writing for the 2nd Appellate Court, confirmed the objectives of government schooling when he wrote that "keeping the children at home deprived them of situations where . . . they could develop emotionally in a broader world than the parents' 'cloistered setting'."

Of course, inoculating against cultural rot is the primary consideration in most parents' decision to homeschool. Another is substantive curriculum.

Research shows that young children, in particular, do not do as well in mass-institutional settings. Without guidance and leadership administered by caring and interested adults, youngsters tend to form brutal Lord of the Flies subcultures that do not serve their best interests now nor anyone else's later, when they graduate. The result is cultural devolution and a country awash in lawlessness and violence.

Take away the focus that academics provide, and children will compete, but not for good grades. They will compete to see who can intimidate other pupils, who can wear the most outrageous clothes, who can mouth the filthiest obscenities, who can wreak the most havoc, even who can get pregnant first.

This is precisely the environment from which homeschoolers have seceded. The average public school not only is stressful, dysfunctional, and unstructured but actively encourages poor character. Government schools are not attempting to form critical thinkers, analytical thinkers, or any other kind of thinkers. They promote "consensus" (groupthink), knee-jerk emotionalism, interdependence, and peer pressure. Then they tell kids to "say no to drugs" and gangs.

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Abundant opportunities exist for youngsters to socialize—church, neighborhood, and structured recreational activities such as music, dance, swimming, camping. The appellate-court judges know this. What they object to is parents choosing which activities their children pursue and with whom they will associate.

Public Law 92-96-88, Title I, Section 101, No. 3 states: "Parents have the primary responsibility for the education of their children and states, localities, and private interests have the primary responsibility for supporting that parental role." In 1970, Congress issued an amendment to the General Education Provisions Act: a "Prohibition Against Federal Control of Education." This was reiterated in the Education Amendments of 1976, just as the new U.S. Department of Education was assuming Cabinet-level status.

Some 30 years later, here comes the California Teachers Association, the state arm of the NEA, applauding the court for sticking it to homeschooling parents. This was predictable. In its annual legislative agenda, the NEA has for years been attempting to categorize homeschooling as outright child abuse.

When I taught in the California public-school system (Orange County, 1968-73), it was clear to me where things were headed. Prevailing wisdom held that parents were amateurs unless they had degrees in behavioral psychology. Nothing they said carried weight concerning school policy, curriculum, textbooks, or teaching methods, even if the parents in question were otherwise well educated.

Parents began protesting sex education in the 1950's—not because sex was included *per se*, but because it was being treated as a course apart from physiology. This overemphasis, most parents felt, would catapult youngsters into a world of obsessive sexuality and serve to titillate rather than to inform.

They were proved correct.

Sex educators kept pushing the envelope, urging more graphic curricula until, by the 1980's, sex-ed was more about arousal than reproduction, more about how-to's than health.

Not only have the rates of sexually transmitted diseases soared, but pornography and perversion are now pervasive. Illegitimacy has skyrocketed to nearly 40 percent of U.S. babies (70 percent among blacks, which had leveled out at 30 percent in the 1950's). Divorce and cohabitation devastate families, traumatize children, and increase healthcare costs.

Predictably, the media has followed education's lead: We're subjected to happy-face, nonjudgmental herpes commercials—which fail to inform that these diseases ravage the mouths of those naive enough to believe that "oral sex isn't really sex."

Depictions of sex on television, in movies, and in fashion magazines have many among the Woodstock generation cringing. It isn't just that the over-50 crowd is experiencing a midlife crisis. Baby boomers are aghast at what their love fests of the 60's actually produced. Sex is no longer about flirtation, sensuality, or affection. It is about calisthenics—how many, what kind, and the level of bizarreness. Sex has turned lurid. Rape, incest, deviancy, and sadism are grossly overrepresented in today's films, TV dramas, and sitcoms.

It is difficult enough to protect youngsters without the courts pronouncing (in 2005) that "parental rights stop at the schoolhouse door." Combined with other antiparent rulings, including the ousting of religious morality, it is hard to imagine what schools will be like in another 25 years.

In addition, schoolchildren are being exposed to intimate questionnaires and probing surveys under the guise of education. The modesty ethic has been stood on its head, with the excuse that, if one has "nothing to hide," intimate questions should not be a problem. Then, when kids respond poorly, their parents are pressured to administer psychotropic drugs and to enlist the school counselor, who nearly always slaps a label of mental illness on the child. Many wind up in special education, which has itself devolved into a holding tank for "conduct disorders." Special-ed teachers have nothing in their arsenals to combat real academic difficulties; consequently, disciplinary issues have become the central focus of such placement.

Today, some two million homeschoolers reject the government *diktat* that all children attend "accredited institutional settings." That is a good sign, but parents should have drawn the line 35 years ago, followed by a nationwide taxpayer hissy fit.

In an era that equates outrage with mental illness and "refuseniks" with criminality, parents are discouraged from serious activism. In the wake of this latest attack on parental rights, Americans who balk at any policy are about to find themselves squeezed out.

There was a time when Americans expected a place at the table whenever disagreements over policy occurred. Now, parents who show up at the public school to examine textbooks, or merely to sit in on a child's class (as in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma), are being escorted away by police.

From there, it is a short step to mandatory counseling or, we might say, punitive psychiatry.

Beverly K. Eakman is a former teacher who served for 15 years in federal government. Based in Washington, D.C., she is a freelance writer, consultant, and the author of four books on education policy, including Walking Targets: How Our Psychologized Classrooms Are Producing a Nation of Sitting Ducks.

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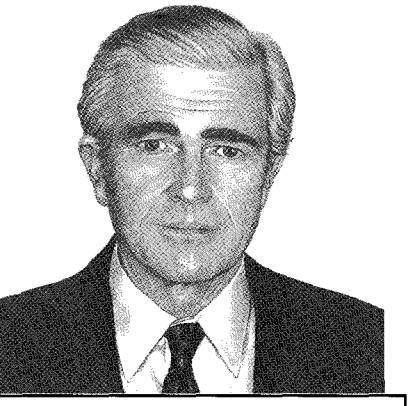
by George McCartney

Blubbering



Body of Lies

Produced by De Line Pictures and Scott Free Productions
Directed by Ridley Scott
Screenplay by William Monahan
Distributed by Warner Brothers

Director Ridley Scott and his scenarist William Monahan adapted *Body of Lies* from David Ignatius' novel of the same title. The narrative is yet another sorry tale of our military presence in the Middle East, the tar baby our neocon establishment insisted we attack five years ago. Like Brer Rabbit, we've been mired in the region's sticky embrace ever since. The more we fight, the more we're ensnared.

Like the other films on the subject, Scott seems to want to say something important, but like the others he has left out the key ingredient: His film does not mention Israel once. The closest he comes to referencing our primary ally in the region is by way of a delicate circumlocution that uses a human pawn in the narrative's cynical espionage game—a young Arab who has been driven to fanaticism by having suffered with his family in a Palestinian refugee camp since his infancy. Nothing is said of how he came to be in the camp, of course. An invisible *purdah* continues to veil the inconvenient facts of 1948 and the routing of 700,000 Palestinians from their homes to make way for Jewish settlers. The only films to address the origins of the Arab-Israeli conflict honestly are those made by Arabs and Israelis, and few of them have been shown in this country. Generally, American entertainers and politicians won't touch the subject for fear the American Israel Public Affairs Committee will lower the boom on their careers. This is extremely sad. For there is no hope for the region until everyone on all sides faces the facts as they are, not as they have been crafted by the ideological propagandists pretending to be journalists in the pages of *The Weekly Standard* and *National Review*. This doesn't mean abandoning Israel; as a large and growing Israeli movement has recognized, Israel's future depends upon achieving some kind of just coexistence with the Palestinians. It's a matter of both honor and enlightened self-interest that they do so.

Scott's film manages to portray the bleakness of the Middle Eastern situation with depressing effectiveness. He traces the efforts of Ed Hoffman (Russell Crowe), a CIA desk honcho, as Hoffman tracks an Osama bin Laden-like terrorist-in-chief, one Al-Saleem (Alon Abutbul), who is behind several bombings on European soil. Hoffman likes to work 24/7, hatching ever more fantastically fatal schemes for the field agents he directs from the comfort of his upper-middle-class home near Langley, Virginia. As Hoffman tends to his daily domestic duties—chauffeuring his daughter to her soccer games, guiding his son's first attempts at peeing into the commode—he wears a hands-free headset to keep in constant touch with his operatives, chief of whom is field agent Roger Ferris (Leonardo DiCaprio), based in Baghdad and later Amman. Hoffman and Ferris play a sort of electronic Laurel and Hardy act *via* satellite. The self-important, obese Hoffman gruffly issues fatuous Hardyesque commands to the skinny Ferris, who resembles an increasingly befuddled Laurel.

Crowe reportedly gained 50 pounds to play his part as the self-satisfied know-it-all who never learns from his innumerable mistakes. This weight-gain gimmick has become the mark of thespian distinction over the past 30 years, starting with Robert De Niro's turn as the former middleweight Jake LaMotta in his dissolute roly-poly retirement. Since then George Clooney and Charlize Theron, among others, have flabbed up for art. Such lardihood has never impressed me as anything more than an ill-advised stunt. Here, however, I have to concede that the extra flesh has enabled Crowe to embody the, shall we say, well-upholstered soul of a man who has thoroughly muffled whatever capacity he might once have had for compunction. Like Oliver Hardy, Hoffman is entirely unable to see that his lame-brained schemes lead ineluctably to embarrassing, not to say nearly fatal, pratfalls for his hapless Stan Laurel in the field.

At one point, Hoffman refuses to allow Ferris to grant asylum to an Al Qaeda turncoat who has just spilled his guts to the operative. Hoffman reasons that the man has been milked dry. As an intelligence asset, he has more value on the loose. His former Al Qaeda colleagues will come into the open in order to kill him, giving Ferris his opportunity to track them back to their terrorist nest. The plan backfires badly, resulting in the death of the luckless ex-jihadi. Soon after, Ferris finds himself at the wrong end of a rocket-propelled grenade. Waking in a Jordanian hospital, he discovers a doctor is tweezing large bone fragments from his leg. His face registers horror until his physician dryly observes, "Not yours." The fragments belong to the Iraqi ally who had been traveling with him when their jeep was hit. Those with strong stomachs may find this scene grimly humorous, although its comedy is rather more bloody than Stan Laurel's usual routine.

Having failed in Iraq, Hoffman

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moves Ferris to Amman, where the redoubtable young man meets the head of Jordanian intelligence, Hani (Mark Strong), a fellow as slick as chrome and twice as cold. With bland irony, Hani welcomes Ferris "to our promising country" and agrees to help find Al-Saleem. He has one condition, however. Ferris must never lie to him. Ferris unreservedly pledges his fidelity, but we know he's faking.

With a blend of carefully calibrated bribery and intimidation, Hani pressures a low-level Al-Saleem follower named Karami to be his spy in the enemy camp. Learning of this, Hoffman jets to Amman to meet his estimable counterpart. The habitually disheveled Hoffman no sooner waddles through Hani's office door than he's condescendingly congratulating the elegantly tailored Jordanian. "You've done a wonderful job developing this asset, Karubi," he says with all-American unction—even as he gets the man's name wrong. Not an impressive show for one in his line of work. But hell, a wog's a wog by any other name.

When Hoffman demands to meet with Karami himself, Hani flatly rejects his request. "You Americans," he frostily explains, "are incapable of secrecy because you live in a democracy. We don't have that problem." Hoffman threatens to go to the king, but Hani counters that, in matters of intelligence, he is the king.

Hoffman tries to pull cultural rank as he leaves Hani's office. "You guys might have invented algebra, but we applied it," he chuckles darkly. His knuckleheaded arrogance is, alas, all too believable.

After this, Ferris and Hoffman concoct what they think will be the ultimate foolproof operation. They arrange to invent their own jihadi in order to smoke Al-Saleem into the open. For the sake of verisimilitude, they stage a bombing attack on the U.S. Incirlik Air Base in Turkey and make it look like it was masterminded by a Jordanian architect, an innocent man they have chosen virtually out of a hat. Even Laurel and Hardy were never quite this hapless. What follows isn't all that surprising.

As always with Scott's films, *Body* is visually compelling. On one hand, there are the scenes of grimy ground-level action in the crowded marketplaces and empty deserts of Iraq and Jordan. On the other, there are the magisterial satellite surveillance panoramas being monitored by espionage bureaucrats at CIA headquarters. Confusing immediacy one moment; cool, calculating detachment the next. This visual juxtaposition is a crucial element in the film's characterization and themes. In close-up, Ferris humanly engages with the Arabs he has come to know; at long distance, Hoffman calculates the value of his many human assets as he moves them around the chessboard of modern warfare. And this brings us back to the bone fragments. While Arab suffering and the pain it occasions for Americans finally penetrate Ferris, they never once pierce the complacently enblubbered Hoffman. On the battlefield, horror; on the home front, indifference. But as we already know, our defensive blubber has not and will not protect us from rabidly determined foes.

The theater in which I saw Scott's film is located in an economically depressed working-class neighborhood about a mile from New York's JFK Airport, a military recruiter's dream location filled with prime prospects for our Iraq adventure. As I made my way to my car through the litter of discarded popcorn cartons and paper coffee cups, I noticed something familiar amid the debris—a scapular. A scapular is a Roman Catholic sacramental, two rectangular pieces of brown wool attached to each other by strips of cotton, designed to slip over one's head so that one wool piece hangs on your chest and the other on your back. The images of Our Lady of Mount Carmel and St. Simon Stock were sewn onto the wool. The idea is to echo the full scapular or shoulder cloak worn by monks and nuns so that laymen can participate in the rigorous devotion of those who take monastic vows. The scapular's origins are debated, but Church lore traces it back to St. Simon Stock's encounter with the Blessed Mother in 1251. During her appearance to him, Mary is said to have told Simon that anyone wearing the scapular at the hour of his death would be protected from final damnation.

I hadn't seen a scapular in perhaps 30 years. As I examined it, I heard an airliner above me. Looking up, I saw that its fuselage bore the word *Emirates*. I'm not ordinarily superstitious, but this juxtaposition—a nearly forgotten Catholic sacramental, Arab commerce thriving on high, and a film about America's inability to deal with Islamic zealotry—seemed revelatory. A scene in the film forcefully came back to me. A CIA agent is about to have his head separated from his shoulders—the scapular region, you'll note—courtesy of some offended Muslims. Raising his knife, the lead executioner invokes Allah to justify the deed, declaring that the agent is a nonbeliever and therefore deserving of a grisly death. Nevertheless, he repeatedly invites the agent to pray, which the American conspicuously does not.

As the roar of the Dubai-bound luxury liner rose, I realized once more why America is losing grip. While we have carelessly discarded our traditional beliefs, the Islamic world metes death to those who draw cartoons of its prophet. It's the old question: How do we keep going if we no longer believe in ourselves? From a vibrant, committed culture, we have evolved into a sophisticated but lackluster civilization. Where, I wondered, was the regenerative sacramental that would defend us against our own doubts?

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by Chilton Williamson, Jr.

So Far From God

The poor United States of America: so far from God, so close to Mexico.

President Franklin Roosevelt, in his First Inaugural Address, announced what became known as the Good Neighbor Policy. "In the field of world policy," Roosevelt said, "I would dedicate this nation to the policy of the good neighbor—the neighbor who resolutely respects himself and, because he does so, respects the right of others." Later that year, Secretary of State Cordell Hull, at the Montevideo Conference, gave American support to the declaration that "No state has the right to intervene in the internal or external affairs of another." Two days after its adoption, Roosevelt confirmed the intention of that declaration when he said, "The definite policy of the U.S. from now on is one opposed to armed intervention."

In the three quarters of a century since then, the American empire has violated its own freely offered policy on numerous occasions, in respect of Latin America and elsewhere. Following 1933, when U.S. forces departed Nicaragua leaving Anastasio Somoza in command of the country, Washington has either invaded or engineered wars and coups in Guatemala, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Chile, Nicaragua, Granada, Panama, Nicaragua again, Colombia, and Venezuela. This record of aggression against sovereign Central and South American countries stands in surreal contrast to the willingness of the United States to tolerate, over the past four decades, the invasion across her southern border of tens of millions of Latin American immigrants, the large majority of them Mexicans but among these many Central and South Americans as well. This history of passive-aggressive behavior on the part of a major power must be unparalleled since the days of the Roman Empire if not earlier, depending on which historian one consults. It seems to defy explanation, yet history, being a human process, must be humanly explicable to some degree or another. In this instance, the answer may have to do with the fact that an empire views itself and its interests differently from how a nation-state does, and that, since 1945, the United States has come increasingly to think like a global empire, rather than like one nation among a couple of hundred others.

This explanation accounts for the classical historical parallel mentioned above. The ancient empires, nations, and republics did not, of course, enjoy the benefit of a Christian understanding of sovereignty, of the nation, and of the national state that was formulated during the Middle Ages and early modern times. Neither do modern Western governments, which have long been post-Christian entities, ruling over post-Christian populations. This suggests how an arrogant, aggressive superpower (shortly to become an arrogant, aggressive ex-superpower) can behave as a passive, self-insecure nation, at once capable of offensive and belligerent behavior against other nations and incapable of resisting a "peaceful" invasion from what the Russians would call her near-abroad (and elsewhere) in defense of her sovereign borders. Once the United States abandoned the concept of nationhood as it is understood in Christian terms, she forfeited the self-respect to which Roosevelt referred. And in doing so, she learned a general disrespect for both nations and the notion of national interest that has encouraged her to run roughshod over other countries in pursuit of ideological aims, such as the realization of democracy and democratic capitalism around the globe. The resulting attitude is summed up in the now familiar phrase, "invade the world, invite the world"—maximum imperial self-confidence joined with minimal national confidence; post-Christian international hubris linked to a sentimental, post-Christian denial of what is owed to oneself, to one's near-and-dear, to one's people, to one's culture, to one's religion, and to one's country. Thomas Aquinas would have argued—indeed, he did argue—against both heresies. So did Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who earned the scorn of the enlightened West, as well as that of the Soviet communists, by insisting that individual nations are so many facets of the divine human creation, each one of them endowed with its own integrity, interest, and discrete splendor.

Here is the reason why the United States has always made such a botch of her relations with her immediate south-of-the-border neighbor, why she has never been able either to live with Mexico and her people, or apart from them, either in real enmity or true amity. It is entirely in accordance with the evolution of American political thought, feeling, and development that the nation which seized northern Mexico from the government in Mexico City 160 years ago in the name of Manifest Destiny is nowadays unwilling to deny illegal immigrants from Mexico what amounts to free and unlimited (if often inconvenient) access to the United States in the name of international humanitarianism. It is thus that the alien "Panchos," "greasers," and "wetbacks" of yesterday have become the "children of God" whom Senator McCain welcomes today. Once again, we see how the United States—which, while acting as an ideological empire, has the moral confidence to bully the world—is, in her role as a traditional nation-state, insufficiently confident to press

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her most fundamental rights and interests. And this philosophical confusion has produced results that have been unfair to herself, as well as to Mexico (and other countries).

For this confusion, we have the Christian churches to blame, as well as the politicians. Beginning in the last century, organized Christianity in all its denominations has been vocal in expressing its belief that empires and nation-states are theologically suspect, if not actually in defiance of Christian principles and teachings. Whether secular or religious liberalism is responsible originally for the spread of this sort of thinking is arguable. It appears, though, that here is an instance of Christians trying to make themselves and their Faith palatable to modern liberals by updating it to conform with the principles of liberalism and liberal internationalism, in the manner that the Catholic Church in the United States, following the War Between the States, tried to make Her peace with democratic America by reassuring non-Catholic Americans that She was more the American Church of Rome than She was the Church of Rome in America. Since then, this American Church has been increasingly inclined to fall into line behind the Protestant churches, as their teachings developed from the Social Gospel and Protestant liberalism generally—not, of course, in respect of social teaching, but rather of national and international politics.

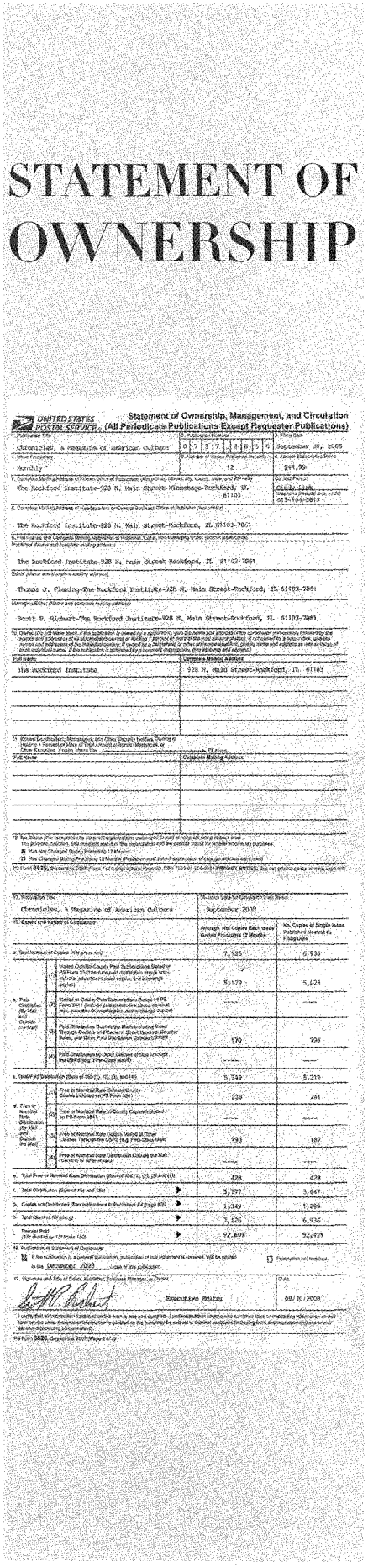
A sea change has occurred since World War II in the Roman Catholic understanding of the right to immigration, as well as emigration—partly in response to the international migrations of peoples during the past half-century caused by overpopulation of the Third World, and partly to the political instability and economic collapse, repressive governance, nationalistic excess, and racial and ethnic conflict that have marked this period of history. In addition to these external factors, the Church's own councils have influenced Her attitude toward migration, in particular Vatican II (1962-65), which stressed ecumenism and international cooperation, thus underscoring the magisterium's suspicion of the nation-state. In the 1980's, an aptly named priest, Fr. Paul B. Marx, told his congregation in Buffalo, New York,

> I tell the Mexicans when I am down in Mexico to keep on having children, and then to take back what we took from them: California, Texas, Arizona, and then to take the rest of the country as well.

For these remarks, Father Marx should have been removed from his parish and sent back to seminary for a refresher immersion course in traditional Catholic theology, the works of Augustine and Aquinas especially.

In the summer of 2008, Washington became embroiled with Mexico City in a dispute over the terms of a bill then wending its way through the U.S. Congress that provided substantial financial aid to the Mexican government in prosecuting its war against the drug cartels, the *narcotraficantes*, and the coca and marijuana farmers in Mexico. At issue was a provision in the bill that defendants prosecuted in the course of what amounts almost to civil war must be tried in accordance with American notions of procedural fairness. The Mexicans, quite understandably, bristled at this demand. What right had the gringo government to decide details of legal procedure south of the Rio Grande? It was not as if the Americans were acting from the goodness of their hearts; they, too, stood to gain from President Calderón's success in defeating the cartels, which are entrenched in cities along the international border as well as the Mexican heartland. In the end, an accommodation was reached, the bill was passed, and Mexico City will soon have its money and its helicopters. But it is important to set this controversy in the context of the Bush administration's concurrent "crackdown" on illegal Mexican aliens in the United States.

During the presidency of Mexican President Vicente Fox, as now under that of Felipe Calderón, the govern-



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The Rockford Institute-928 N. Main Street-Rockford, IL 61103-7061

The Rockford Institute-928 N. Main Street-Rockford, IL 61103-7061

Thomas J. Fleming-The Rockford Institute-928 N. Main Street-Rockford, IL 61103-7061

Scott P. Richert-The Rockford Institute-928 N. Main Street-Rockford, IL 61103-7061

Full Name	Complete Mailing Address
The Rockford Institute	928 N. Main Street-Rockford, IL 61103

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ment, at what it considered to be prudent intervals, sent the Federales—the Mexican army—into the Sierra Madre Occidental with orders to burn out selected *mota* and *perico* fields—"the crop that pays," as the Mexicans say—under cultivation by a few unfortunate farmers. Not many fields, not many farmers—just enough to convince Alfred E. Newman in the Casa Blanca in Washington that the Mexican government was doing its part to halt the smuggling of drugs across the border into *El Norte*. (What George Bush may know, or not know, is that it is the habit of these burned-out farmers, and all who depend on them and their crop, to head north themselves—to El Paso, Tucson, Phoenix, San Diego, Los Angeles—to recoup their profits in the drug business there, before returning to the wilds of the bandit-ridden Sierra to seed their fields once again with the crop that pays.)

Similarly, and while the fight over the drug-war bill was in progress, Mr. Bush was involved in an act of grandstanding of his own, one whose intended audience was in part the Mexican government but, more importantly, the American public itself. It is difficult to believe that the President who laid his reputation on the line in two attempts to pass an amnesty, or "comprehensive immigration reform," bill expects his current, much-touted "crackdown" on the employers of illegal immigrants, and on the aliens themselves, to succeed, or that he wishes it success. At best, this is political theater; at worst, a cynical attempt at enraging the targeted employers and annoying other Americans by leaving their apples unpicked and making it hard for them to find all the nannies and gardeners they think they need—by forcing, that is, the congressional enemies of amnesty to cry uncle to their constituencies. Whether this understanding of Bush's intentions is fair or not, a significant number of immigrants is on its way home to Mexico in what amounts to an act of mass self-deportation. That is all to the good so far as the United States is concerned. It is not so good in respect of the Republic of Mexico, and of Mexico's "children of God" whose illegal presence here was encouraged and abetted by one presidential administration after another.

All this could have been avoided had the United States, morally secure in her identity as a traditional nation rather than infatuated with her self-image as a city on a hill and a beacon to mankind, insisted on her internationally recognized rights as a sovereign nation and secured her borders against invasion by foreigners. Then the illegal immigrants would not have come here, we would not have as many as 20 million of them living among us, the authoritarian and often repressive Mexican government could not have relied on emigration to the north as a social and political safety valve, and the Mexican politicians would have been forced to make the appropriate political and economic reforms. But it was not to be. The United States is, indeed, too far from God. And Mexico is far, far too close to her welcoming, beneficent Uncle Sam. ©

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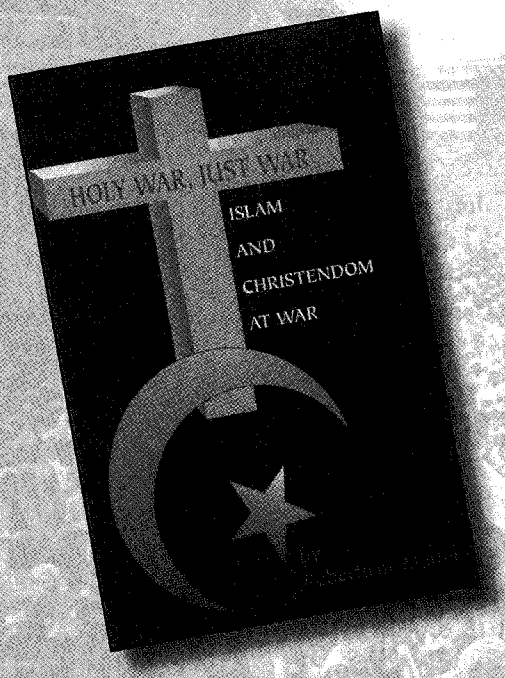

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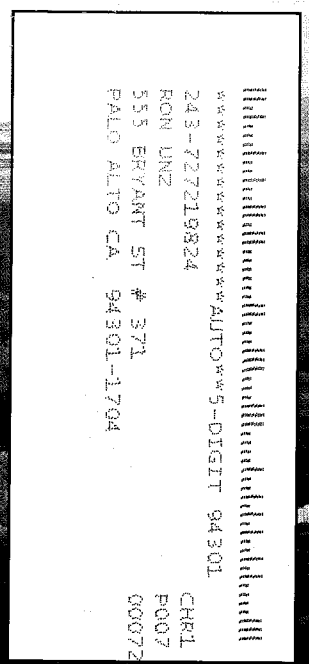

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